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Since 9/11 the U.S. Government (USG) has placed greater emphasis on the importance of Strategic Communication (SC) and Public Diplomacy (PD) in order to better understand, engage with, and influence foreign publics. The globalized and electronic-media driven information environment in particular creates new opportunities and vulnerabilities for the U.S. and its allies. As a nation at war, the U.S. has consistently responded with urgency to leverage all pillars of national power, including the information pillar. The USG deployed a robust information effort during the Cold War; however, in recent times the USG's information capabilities have languished, and coordination among agencies remains a challenge. This study analyzes some recent initiatives for civilian-military coordination and shows that lessons learned from recent campaigns can provide useful insights for formulating working principles for SC between military and civilian agencies, especially at the operational level.					
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**NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY**

**JOINT FORCES STAFF COLLEGE**

**JOINT ADVANCED WARFIGHTING SCHOOL**



**ADVANCING U.S. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION THROUGH GREATER  
CIVILIAN-MILITARY COORDINATION AND INTERGRATION**

by

**Wendy A. Kolls**

***U.S. Department of State***



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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College, the Department of Defense, or the Department of State.

This paper is entirely my own work except as documented in footnotes.

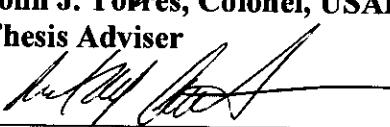
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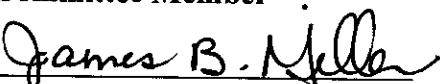
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## ABSTRACT

Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the U.S. Government (USG) has placed greater emphasis on the importance of Strategic Communication (SC) and Public Diplomacy (PD) in order to better understand, engage with and influence foreign publics. Several critical inquiries into U.S. efforts prior to and in the years immediately after 9/11 have yielded a general consensus on needed changes in U.S. Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy to respond to the current national security milieu. The globalized and electronic-media driven information environment in particular creates new opportunities and vulnerabilities for the U.S. and its allies. As a nation at war, the U.S. has consistently responded with urgency to leverage all pillars of national power, including the information pillar. The USG deployed a robust information effort during the Cold War; however in recent times the USG's information capabilities have languished.

One of the most important recommendations coming out of a ten-year period of inquiry into PD and SC is that the U.S. government should increase coordination of its civilian and military efforts in these disciplines to enhance overall effectiveness. While the current approach to coordination remains mainly ad hoc, this study analyzes some noteworthy initiatives in the direction of formalizing civilian-military coordination and integration between the Department of Defense and the Department of State. While these recent efforts have mostly focused on specific mission objectives in the current Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns, this study shows that lessons learned from them can provide useful insights for formulating a common understanding of SC concepts and working principles between military and civilian agencies, especially at the operational level.

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## INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Government has emphasized in recent years that the practice of Strategic Communication (SC)<sup>1</sup> and Public Diplomacy (PD) is crucial to advancing U.S. foreign policy and should be given greater attention in strategy and planning. This national level concern follows critical internal and external reports of the failures of Public Diplomacy to achieve support for U.S. policies among foreign audiences since the end of the Cold War.<sup>2</sup> In particular, critics point out that the U.S. has failed to “win over” Muslim populations,<sup>3</sup> especially in the Middle East;<sup>4</sup> many have linked Al Qaeda propaganda successes to the negative image of the U.S. and U.S. policies pervasive in the Muslim world at the time of the 9/11 attacks. Both the U.S. Department of State (DOS) and the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) have made efforts to assess current practices and propose approaches to improving U.S. strategic communication capabilities. There is also

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<sup>1</sup> Strategic Communication, in the singular form, is the preferred usage in most current U.S. government policy documents; however, the plural form, Strategic Communications, is also commonly used by U.S. officials and is also the preferred usage of the term by NATO officials. “StratCom” is also routinely used. For the purposes of this study the terms are considered interchangeable, as they essentially refer to the same concepts and practices, and are still used interchangeably by practitioners.

<sup>2</sup> See the Defense Science Board Report on Strategic Communication, which states, “The United States faces continuing decay in support for U.S. policy and rising anti-Americanism, which challenges national interests.” Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, Defense Science Board, Task Force on Strategic Communication, January 2008.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. the 2009 Pew Research Center *Global Attitudes Project* warns, “In predominantly Muslim nations, widespread concerns about American policy and American power linger.” *Global Attitudes Project*, Pew Research Center, Released: July 23, 2009. [www.pewglobal.org/2009/07/23/lessons-from-the-2009-global-attitudes-survey-transcript/](http://www.pewglobal.org/2009/07/23/lessons-from-the-2009-global-attitudes-survey-transcript/) (accessed June 6, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> This problem was noted even earlier: Barely one month after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, R.S. Zaharna, a scholar of public communication at American University, writes in a November 2001 policy report that President Bush’s communication effort in response to the attacks, while successful with the U.S. and U.K. audiences, was detrimental to acceptance of U.S. policy in the Arab and Muslim world. The Administration’s misjudgement of how to communicate with the Muslim world further alienated Muslim audiences; furthermore, by not reaching out with appropriate communication before certain actions were already taken meant that, “By failing to seize the communication initiative, America lost control of its message.” See R.S. Zaharna, “American Public Diplomacy in the Arab and Muslim World: A Strategic Communication Analysis,” *Foreign Policy Focus*, November 2001, 1-4.

a greater interest—as part of the whole of government initiative<sup>5</sup>—in enhancing interagency coordination and alignment of strategic communication strategies and efforts.

Disagreement and confusion about what strategic communication<sup>6</sup> is and when and how it should be employed is still an obstacle to progress in a whole of government approach to strategic communication, let alone properly solidifying its role within a single agency. Additionally, there is ongoing controversy about what roles should be strictly civilian and what roles strictly military, and under what circumstances it would be appropriate and feasible to have coordinated civilian-military efforts employed.

While the U.S. Government has succeeded in raising awareness at the national level of the importance of Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy in today's national security environment, most coordinated efforts in this field between the Department of Defense and the Department of State have been limited to specific mission objectives in the current Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns. Civilian-military SC coordination continues to be problematic. The Department of Defense has also

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<sup>5</sup> As formally adopted in the Department of Defense's 2009 Quadrennial Roles and Missions Review Report. This approach reflects recommendations made in 2008 by the Project on National Security Reform *Quadrennial Roles and Missions Review Report*, calling for establishing a more permanent framework that includes "commonly understood strategic concepts, operational principles, relationships between agencies, and roles and responsibilities." Reported in article by Walter Pincus, "Pentagon Recommends 'Whole-of-Government' National Security Plans," *The Washington Post*, February 2, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> While there is considerable disagreement among practitioners across government on the precise definition of Strategic Communication(s), according to the U.S. Military, it is described as "focused United States Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of United States Government interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power." *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02, Washington DC, 12 April 2001 (as amended through 17 March 2009), 518.

emphasized the need for SC training and education to strengthen a whole of government approach.<sup>7</sup>

This study gauges the state of progress towards the objective of advancing the U.S. government's practice of public diplomacy and strategic communication since September 11, 2001. It analyzes recent studies, reports and policy statements in the context of a ten-year period of national inquiry into the appropriate role of strategic communication and public diplomacy in U.S. national security.

In addition, this study seeks to further clarify the degree of progress achieved—and the challenges the country is still facing—in U.S. government efforts during the period between 2009 and 2012. The 2009-2012 timeframe represents, in contrast to the 2001-2008 timeframe, a period of increasing consensus and clarity within the U.S. government as to which reforms are suitable and feasible (and which are not) after a decade of intensive inquiry to assess, understand and recommend approaches to more effective communication with worldwide audiences.

The dialog of ideas has moved online. Many of the documents and statements—as well as reactions to them in relation to current events and practices in government—are

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<sup>7</sup> Strategic Communication (SC) is listed as number three of nine Special Areas of Emphasis (SAEs) for the 2011 Joint Professional Military Education (JPME)'s Special Areas of Emphasis (SAEs) as approved by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: "...The U.S. military is not sufficiently trained or equipped to analyze, plan, coordinate, and integrate the full spectrum of capabilities available to promote America's interests. Changes in the global information environment require the Department of Defense, in conjunction with other USG agencies, to implement more deliberate and well developed strategic communications processes. Effective communication by the United States must build upon coordinated actions and information at all levels of the USG to maintain credibility and trust. Students should understand the significance of Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR)-identified gaps in the primary communications supporting capabilities of public affairs, aspects of information operations, military diplomacy, and defense support to public diplomacy. JPME should emphasize the QDR goal for the Department of Defense to develop a culture that recognizes the value of communication and integrates communications considerations into policy development, operational planning, execution, and assessment to advance national interests." Admiral M.G. Mullen, Memorandum from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff approving the 2011 Joint Professional Military Education Special Areas of Emphasis, CM-1421-11, Washington, D.C., May 16, 2011.

critiqued and debated by experts and practitioners on government, academic and professional-interest websites. In addition, government officials and recognized public diplomacy and strategic communication experts now tend to publish their scholarly articles and professional reports on government, academic, and think tank websites. They also post other types of commentary and analysis on respected independent websites (blogs) and on the designated discussion sections for responses to articles and reports published on online government and professional journals. All of these documented discussions add to the body of knowledge on the practice of these disciplines and are a major source of reference for this study on the current state of U.S. public diplomacy and strategic communication.

Practitioners and scholars in the field of strategic communication have been particularly keen to shift away from traditional print publications to the much faster-paced online forum, which affords more immediate impact for policy makers and practitioners in the field. In addition, the potential for real-time (or the nearly real-time) exchange of ideas reflects the new reality in the actual strategic environment where public diplomacy and strategic communications will succeed or fail.

Chapter One identifies two moments of crisis for U.S. public diplomacy since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and examines the U.S. response to those crises. This chapter, which situates the problem in the context of a nation at war, also looks back and highlights key events in the background of the policies and practices of the U.S. government's efforts to engage and influence foreign audiences from the WWII era of the first modern information services, to the United States Information Agency (USIA) era and the end of the Cold War. This chapter draws attention to the changing

characterizations of public diplomacy operations of the U.S. Information Agency (until 1999) and the U.S. Department of State. These sometimes subtle, sometimes dramatic changes can be more clearly understood as relating to shifts in the nation's political mood in the face of increasing or decreasing threats. In the same chapter, the recent trend towards the use of "smart power" and a whole of government approach is linked with the ascendance of the concept of Strategic Communication and the movement to synchronize U.S. information practices among different government agencies, most particularly addressing the challenges of coordinating DOS and DoD efforts. Since the U.S. involvement in the Global War on Terror (GWOT) the field of public diplomacy has been closely associated with the concept of Strategic Communication, which encompasses military as well as diplomatic concepts and approaches to the use of the information pillar of national power (the "I" in DIME)<sup>8</sup>

Chapter Two examines the political context of the U.S. failure to win hearts and minds in the Muslim world, especially after 9/11, and considers the recommended policy and structural reforms of government public diplomacy and strategic communication enterprises.

Chapter Three traces the increasing degree of importance which U.S. leadership has placed on improving civilian-military coordination over the course of the U.S. engagement in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, with the most noteworthy advances following lessons learned in the earlier years of both campaigns. An example of an emerging concept of a coordinated, whole of government approach to the war effort can be seen in the 2009 U.S. Government Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan for

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<sup>8</sup> The four instruments of national power are widely recognized as: Diplomatic, Information, Military and Economic, or "DIME."

Afghanistan (ICMCP)<sup>9</sup>, which has been implemented in the last two years in Afghanistan.

Chapter Four addresses recent efforts to adapt SC and information-related operations in response to strategic-level policy statements and directives. There has been a natural lag in establishing links from the strategic to the operational level; however, there have been some proactive, bottom-up movements coming from the theater of military operations. Recent examples include U.S. government and NATO approaches to applying new concepts of strategic communication and new structures for coordinating information at the operational level. This chapter draws a parallel between U.S. government efforts and NATO's emerging innovations in instituting the role of strategic communications in its policies and structures.

Chapter Five synthesizes the main points of the previous chapters in the context of the successes and failures to effectively coordinate civilian and military strategic communication over the last decade while the U.S. has been at war. This chapter makes several recommendations for operationalizing a civilian-military approach focusing on the theater-level campaign, to include a greater overall civilian contribution to the planning effort; more specifically it calls for more effective civilian participation throughout all levels of the operational planning process. It is particularly important to establish consistent and coherent civilian-military coordination when linking national strategic-level policies consistently throughout operational level planning, therefore enhanced civilian input is required at all levels of the process.

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<sup>9</sup> Karl W. Eikenberry and Stanley A. McChrystal, *United States Government Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan for Support to Afghanistan*, August 2009. The first version of the plan was released in August 2009; revised versions appeared August 2010 and February 2011.

## **CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND**

### **U.S. Public Diplomacy: Recent History**

#### ***Two Crisis Points for PD***

There are two points of crisis for U.S. public diplomacy (PD) in the last ten years. The first point was when the shock and outrage at the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks in 2001 quickly led to criticism of the U.S. government's lack of effective PD in the Muslim world (many reactively assuming that Al Qaeda would not have attacked if we had been doing better PD). This criticism triggered a slew of studies, reports and recommendations on what was wrong with PD and what was not working. At that time, in the immediate period after 9/11, while the nation reassessed its entire national security apparatus, there were not many specific recommendations or solutions, rather the broad consensus was that the U.S. could do better at PD, and needed to pay more attention to it as a nation. There was also broad agreement that the U.S. should focus more resources on the problem. Many reflexively criticized the U.S. government's abolishment of USIA in 1999; however the demise alone of USIA did not adequately explain the rise of the Al Qaeda terrorism phenomenon and the anti-American sentiment in the Arab and Muslim world. Regardless of what was to blame for past failures, there was still the urgent issue of how the post 9/11 strategic communication mission for the U.S. should be prosecuted.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 there has been an emphasis on referring to the U.S. government communication enterprise as "strategic communications," which is broadly congruous with the meaning of "public diplomacy," but also includes those information functions exclusive to military operations, such as Information Operations (IO) and Psychological Operations (PSYOP). In addition, military Public Affairs (PA) includes foreign as well as domestic audiences, whereas U.S. public diplomacy activities are restricted under the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 to the engagement of

### ***Post 9/11 PD Reform: Plagued by Misses and False Starts***

The next crisis point was the years between 2007 and 2009 as the U.S. was engaged (or as many said, becoming “bogged down”) in two drawn-out wars that were taking turns for the worse. The U.S. did not seem to be doing much better at PD and SC and there was increased urgency to get SC right in support of winning the wars and keeping up international support for the U.S. missions overseas. After conducting a thorough analysis for the Defense Policy Center at the RAND National Security Research Division (NSRD) of the studies, reports and recommendations on strategic communications between 2001 and 2008, Christopher Paul concludes that, “According to the published work and the interviews conducted as part of this effort, strategic communication reform has been plagued by misses and false starts and remains an urgent matter.”<sup>2</sup>

### ***Four Key Recommendations***

By the end of 2008 there was a large body of inquiry on the problem, and many solutions recommended. U.S. government officials had begun to address many of those recommendations with new policy statements. However, in spite of overwhelming agreement on the importance of SC/PD and the many statements indicating that improvements were on the way, the U.S. still faced the problem of successfully implementing new initiatives and getting the results so urgently required not only in the

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foreign audiences only. Throughout this study, except where specified, Public Diplomacy (PD) and Strategic Communication (SC) are considered as belonging to the same pillar of the U.S. government’s information enterprise for National Security.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Paul, *Whither Strategic Communications? A Survey of Current Proposals and Recommendations*, (Santa Monica, CA., RAND Corp, February 25, 2009), 16.

two major military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, both of which turned into full on counterinsurgencies, but also the urgent imperative to sustain support from allies and even the U.S. public. The 2009 RAND report done by strategic communications expert Christopher Paul summarizes the most pressing problems impeding progress for U.S. strategic communication and public diplomacy.<sup>3</sup> Paul analyzes all the most important recent contributions to the understanding of the current challenges of U.S. strategic communications and public diplomacy, and he distills the most relevant recommendations into four broad themes: 1) a call for “leadership”; 2) a demand for increased resources for strategic communication and public diplomacy; 3) a call for a clear definition and an overall strategy; 4) the need for better coordination and organizational changes (or additions).<sup>4</sup> For some analysts, and indeed many practitioners in the field, the leadership that would be required to effect any meaningful change would have to come from the very highest level.

### ***President Obama Sets a New Tone***

Just at the time Christopher Paul’s study for the RAND report was being released, a new president was heading to the White House. One of the strongest themes of the report was the need for high level U.S. government leadership to steer public diplomacy in the right direction. In 2009, the new American president took office and made public statements signaling shifts in the U.S. war strategy along with an implicit emphasis on public diplomacy as a major instrument of power in the effort to defeat violent Islamist

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the research and analysis for Paul’s study was completed in October and November 2008. Not long after this RAND report was released, several other U.S. government documents were released addressing strategic communication.

extremism. In his January 20, 2009 Inauguration speech, President Obama specifically sought to redress the problem the U.S. had in its relationships in the Muslim world: "To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect."<sup>5</sup> This was a clarion call for U.S. public diplomacy articulated at the highest level. But this was not, as some suggested, as ploy to merely be seen by foreigners as a kinder and gentler U.S. president, trying to get the Muslims around the world to like him and like America. Mutual respect and mutual interest were a means to an end: that end, made clear by the new president, was defeating terrorist networks with the help of Muslim partners. Consistent with the seriousness of the tone of his inauguration speech, and the urgency of the national security challenges facing the nation, President Obama demonstrated his understanding that his primary task was to ensure the security of the nation. With his speech he indicated an intention to place public diplomacy at the highest level of national security policy.

### ***Engaging Muslims as Partners Against Extremism***

By reaching out to the Muslim world, in essence as equals, Obama was seen by some as attempting to appease Islamist radicals. On the contrary, a close analysis of the speech reveals he is seeking partners in the global effort to defeat extremism. The President makes it clear at the very beginning of his speech: he is a war president. Unlike those who have taken the oath "during the rising tides of prosperity and the still waters of peace," he places himself alongside the U.S presidents in history who have taken the oath "amidst gathering clouds and raging storms."<sup>6</sup> And even though he chooses to make an

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<sup>5</sup> President Barak Obama, "Inauguration Speech," Washington DC, January 20, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

overture of mutual respect to the Muslim world, he nonetheless at the same time reminds his audience, “Our nation is at war, against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred.”<sup>7</sup> In the struggle to defeat Islamist extremism some of the most important partners would be the people and governments of Muslim countries. Creating better relationships in the Muslim world through better U.S. public diplomacy would enable the U.S. to leverage greater cooperation in the fight against al Qaeda and in countering the problem of radicalization among Muslim youth.

In addition to the broad notes of outreach to the Muslim world in his inauguration speech, President Obama also declared that he would make a speech from an Islamic capital within his first 100 days in office. On June 4, 2009, in his Cairo speech President Obama directly addressed the Muslim world and repeated his call for mutual understanding and mutual respect. This time, more explicitly than in his inauguration speech, he linked improved relationships between the U.S. and the Muslim world with the common cause of fighting terrorism: “Our problems must be dealt with through partnership; our progress must be shared … the first issue that we have to confront is violent extremism in all of its forms.”<sup>8</sup>

The fact that the nation was currently involved in two wars in two Muslim countries was a major theme of the new president’s public statements about U.S. foreign policy. He began and ended 2009 with public statements about the war in Afghanistan, first signaling the critical importance of the mission in Afghanistan, then going on to engage in a serious assessment of the war throughout 2009. After extensive deliberation and study during the second half of 2009, Obama publicly announced his new strategy

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> President Obama, “Remarks by the President on a New Beginning,” Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt June 4, 2009.

for Afghanistan in his West Point speech of December 2009.<sup>9</sup>

### *A New War Strategy for Afghanistan*

As a war president, Obama came into office committed to the position that Afghanistan was the “right” war, as pointed out by a foreign affairs analyst Steven Simon in a 2009 article in Foreign Affairs magazine:

During the presidential campaign, Obama emphasized that the war in Iraq was the wrong one; it was the effort in Afghanistan, al Qaeda's base, that was the right war. ‘Only a comprehensive strategy that prioritizes Afghanistan and the fight against al Qaeda will succeed,’ Obama said, “and that's the change I'll bring to the White House.’ The notion that Afghanistan was the epicenter of global terrorism and would prove to be an enduring source of danger to the United States unless the Taliban were subdued became a recurring theme.<sup>10</sup>

As a 2010 GAO report indicates, President Obama quickly sought to establish clear and specific strategic goals for the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan, and in March 2009 he outlined the U.S. Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>11</sup> This was followed by the completion in August 2009 of the first Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan (ICMCP) for Afghanistan. These new war strategies are significant for a study of U.S. strategic communications as they were developed in parallel with new strategies specifically focusing on strategic communications. The Obama Administration clearly considered the “I” in DIME to be an integral part of the U.S. strategy, especially with the growing realization that a counterinsurgency war strategy needed a sound strategic

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<sup>9</sup> President Obama, “Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” United States Military Academy at West Point, West Point, New York, December 1, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Steven Simon, “Can the Right War be Won?” *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, Council on Foreign Relations, 88, number 4 (July/August 2009) 1.

<sup>11</sup> United States Government Accountability Office, report to Congressional Committees on *The Strategic Framework for U.S. Efforts in Afghanistan*. June 15, 2010.

communications strategy.<sup>12</sup>

### ***General McChrystal: the Information Battlespace in Afghanistan***

U.S. military leaders were perhaps the most prominent proponents of emphasizing the role of strategic communications in the U.S. war strategy. In his August 2009 assessment of the war strategy in Afghanistan, U.S. and ISAF Commander General Stanley McChrystal stressed the importance of strategic communications in winning the battle of perceptions, pointing out that the U.S. will win only when the Afghan people perceive that the war is won. “This is a different kind of fight,” McChrystal said in this assessment calling for the need to “redefine the fight” in terms of a population-centric counterinsurgency,<sup>13</sup> which is ultimately tied to gaining the confidence of the population, and where success depends on the way events are perceived by Afghans, even though the U.S. might want to describe them differently. He also noted grimly that the insurgents had been outperforming ISAF in the “information battlespace” in Afghanistan.<sup>14</sup> In his comprehensive assessment of ISAF’s Strategic Communications Annex, McChrystal called for significant changes, including several new objectives, developing communications capacity within the Afghan government, and most notably, “There must be a fundamental change in the culture of how ISAF approaches operations. StratCom should not be a separate Line of Operation, but rather an integral and fully-embedded part

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 1. The GAO report also notes that the new ICMCP for Afghanistan identified “Information” as an important line of effort.

<sup>13</sup> Gen. Stanley McChrystal, Commander’s Initial Assessment, NATO ISAF-Afghanistan/ US Forces/Afghanistan, prepared for U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, August 30, 2009, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Walter Pincus, “McChrystal Says Insurgents Are Winning Communications Battle”, *Washington Post*, September 27, 2009, p. A14 [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/26/AR2009092601748.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/26/AR2009092601748.html) (accessed December 4, 2011).

of policy development, planning processes, and the execution of operations.”<sup>15</sup>

### ***Secretary Gates Calls for Dramatic Increase in Civilian Soft Power***

During the Bush Administration, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates had begun calling for more resourcing for “soft power” capabilities in civilian agencies of the U.S. government to help meet the complex challenges of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. During an oft-quoted 2007 speech he made at Kansas State University, Gates said, “What is clear to me is that there is a need for a dramatic increase in spending on the civilian instruments of national security: diplomacy, strategic communications, foreign assistance, civic action and economic reconstruction and development.”<sup>16</sup>

### ***Admiral Mullen Criticizes Poor Implementation of Strategic Communication***

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen wrote a now famous article on strategic communications institutionalizing what is now widely referred to as avoiding the “say-do gap”: the loss of credibility that comes when your words do not reflect the reality of your actions. The article, published in the U.S. military professional journal *Joint Forces Quarterly*, gained wide attention when reported in the *New York Times* in August 2009<sup>17</sup>. Most of the media coverage of the article exaggerated Mullen’s remarks as a “scathing critique”<sup>18</sup> where he “blasts U.S. strategic

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<sup>15</sup> McChrystal, D-2.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, speech delivered as part of *Landon Lecture Series*, Kansas State University, November 26, 2007. [www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=48226](http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=48226) (accessed February 12, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Thom Shanker, “Message to Muslim World Gets a Critique,” *The New York Times*, August 27, 2009. [www.nytimes.com/2009/08/28/world/28military.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/28/world/28military.html) (accessed May 15, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

communications”<sup>19</sup> efforts. While it is true that Mullen did draw attention to problems and failures in this area—especially in the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan—he actually attributes the failures to the lack of understanding of what strategic communication is supposed to be, which was already well-articulated in U.S. military doctrine by August 2009. The real problem that he is criticizing in his article was the over-emphasis on mechanistic procedures and structures instead of real thinking and understanding and applying concepts appropriately. He states:

We hurt ourselves more when our words don't align with our actions. Our enemies regularly monitor the news to discern coalition and American intent as weighed against the efforts of our forces. When they find a ‘say-do’ gap -- such as Abu Ghraib -- they drive a truck right through it. So should we, quite frankly. We must be vigilant about holding ourselves accountable to higher standards of conduct and closing any gaps, real or perceived, between what we say about ourselves and what we do to back it up. In fact, I would argue that most strategic communication problems are not communication problems at all. They are policy and execution problems.<sup>20</sup>

Many people interpreted Mullen’s point to be to simply let our actions speak for themselves and not to bother trying to say anything about our actions. This would be too extreme an interpretation of Mullen’s remarks. The nuance intended was surely that military officials should think about military actions (and by extension, U.S. policies themselves) in terms of how they will be perceived; if they are bad policies and bad actions no amount of spin will make them better. However, that does not mean the U.S. should *not* communicate with words as well as deeds, to strengthen support for U.S.

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<sup>19</sup> Daniel Nasaw, “Mullen blasts US ‘strategic communication’ efforts in Afghanistan,” *The Guardian*, August 28, 2009. [www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/aug/28/mullen-afghanistan-communication](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/aug/28/mullen-afghanistan-communication) (accessed May 15, 2012). The exaggerated language used by the New York Times and the Guardian inspired many other websites and blogs to repeat these words as the essence of the story, even insinuating that Mullen was declaring the U.S. as losing the war of ideas, rather than conveying the more constructive message of reform that the Chairman intended.

<sup>20</sup> Admiral Michael Mullen, “Strategic Communication: getting Back to Basics,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, issue 55, 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2009, 2-4. (Cited on Joint Chiefs of Staff website.) [www.jcs.mil/newsarticle.aspx?ID=142](http://www.jcs.mil/newsarticle.aspx?ID=142) (accessed December 17, 2011).

objectives. After all, if the U.S. government does not explain its policies and actions, its adversaries will fill the communication void with explanations and misinformation that suit their aims. When Admiral Mullen says, “What we need more than anything is credibility. And we can’t get that in a talking point”<sup>21</sup> he is lamenting that some people think that’s all that strategic communication is—a talking point, mere spin. Clearly the problem is lack of understanding the doctrine and the underlying principles, and a mindless fixation with terminology among too many U.S. personnel. Any widespread lack of understanding of basic concepts and poor implementation is ultimately a leadership failure and commanders should be paying more attention to getting this right. Fortunately Mullen’s article raised the level of discussion and as a result generated greater understanding of strategic communication concepts. However, there is still confusion about the terminology and ongoing challenges with proper coordination of efforts, but at least there has been some progress since Admiral Mullen wrote his article.<sup>22</sup>

Between 2007 and 2009 the U.S. saw the highest level of government—the president as well as the top military leadership—signaling a serious concern about bringing U.S. strategic communication and public diplomacy into line with the post 9/11 strategic environment. The level of importance and the degree of urgency was directly related to the fact that the U.S. was engaged in two major wars as well as an ongoing global campaign to defeat violent extremism.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> For example, the editors of JFQ noted, “the essay penned by Admiral Michael Mullen on the topic of strategic communication produced dozens of letters and nearly a dozen article submissions.” These are just an example of the increased discussion and effort to improve the practice of strategic communication within the military community. See *Joint Forces Quarterly*, issue 56, 1<sup>st</sup> quarter, 2010, 2.

In order to more fully understand the leveraging of the power of information in the context of a nation at war, let us recall the most recent period in history when the U.S. government brought together its civilian and military information capabilities to support a major war effort. The last time the U.S. national security establishment devoted so much attention towards elevating and defining new roles and authorities for U.S. strategic communication, was played out in the context of the major efforts of the Cold War.<sup>23</sup>

### **U.S. Public Diplomacy during the Cold War**

#### ***USIA: a “Success Story”***

Many of the recent critical assessments and national soul-searching about the apparent failures of U.S. public diplomacy since the end of the Cold War tend to frame the problem in terms of contrasting the notable *success* of U.S. public diplomacy in countering Soviet influence during the Cold War contrasted with the evident *failure* of U.S. public diplomacy since the early 1990s. The U.S. public diplomacy successes of the Cold War are well known. Indeed, the collapse of the Soviet Union is considered proof of the ultimate U.S. victory in that struggle. From the end of World War II (WWII) until the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991, the two superpowers fought a war of ideas, competing for the hearts and minds of populations around the world.<sup>24</sup> Some of this

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<sup>23</sup> The civilian-military coordination of the U.S. information effort in the theater of war reached a high mark during the Vietnam conflict. See Nicolas Cull's authoritative study, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989*, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Any discussion of a “war of ideas” tends to lead to an examination of the controversial history of government uses of propaganda. While this study will not attempt to examine that topic in detail, it is worth noting that there is still great disagreement on which information operations and activities from that era (or even the current one) should be considered “propaganda” and which should not. Propaganda itself was not as troublesome a notion for government in the past, especially during WWII. Furthermore, there was a distinction made between “white” propaganda, which was overt and truth-based, and “black” propaganda, which could be covert and use deception. To avoid getting bogged down in definitions, many

effort was directed at their own populations and some at the populations in the “Third World” where the Cold War saw many proxy battles between countries and regimes overtly or covertly aligned with either the U.S.S.R or the U.S. However, neither the U.S. nor the U.S.S.R. ever engaged the other directly in a military battle (though both sides came very close to war during the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962). Nonetheless, the strength, superiority and appeal of the U.S. system of government and the values that underpinned it ultimately prevailed over the Soviet system and the values that it promoted. This was in no small part achieved through the U.S. agency charged with carrying out U.S. policy (including defeating the Soviet Communist ideology) through information campaigns and public diplomacy programs overseas: the United States Information Agency (USIA), or as it was known abroad, the United States Information Service (USIS).

### ***WWII and Pre-WWII Origins of USIA***

USIA evolved out of a U.S. organization established during World War II: the Office of War Information or OWI (1942-1945).<sup>25</sup> The Office of War Information itself evolved out of an earlier U.S. agency, the office of the Coordinator of Information (COI), set up to counter Nazi propaganda broadcasts in Europe. This happened in 1941, before the U.S. entered the war. The office of the Coordinator of Information (OCI), established in July 1941 was authorized by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to conduct propaganda,

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scholars refer to the “you’ll know it when you see it” paradigm. The fact that the public did not seem too preoccupied with this distinction during WWII (and to some degree during the height of the Cold War) is probably why most scholars regard the propaganda label as more a matter of degree--as well as context--during those years. The general view in the U.S. was that the enemy indulged in much more blatant and unacceptable forms of misinformation and deception.

<sup>25</sup> See *The Life and Work of Edward R. Murrow*, Tufts University online exhibit. <http://dca.lib.tufts.edu/features/murrow/exhibit/usia.html> (accessed February 4, 2012). Murrow was Director of USIA from 1961-1964.

information and intelligence activities initially in support of British efforts in Europe.

When in 1942 the OWI was established, the Coordinator of Information (directed by William “Wild Bill” Donovan) became the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), which eventually became the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).<sup>26</sup>

### **The Peace Dividend and the Dismantling of USIA**

#### ***The Berlin Wall Comes Down in 1989***

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the final disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991, many in the U.S. and elsewhere believed the great struggle was over. The world enjoyed unprecedented freedom, peace, and prosperity. The U.S. and NATO vision of a Europe whole and free and at peace was finally realized.<sup>27</sup> The triumph of the West was manifested perhaps most poignantly in the reunification of East and West Germany. Berlin itself had been the ground zero of the Cold War stand off in Europe. The physical wall dividing the city of Berlin gave way to the will of the people to be free. It was East German authorities that opened the wall under the build up of political pressure of the preceding months, and when the wall was opened, the citizens from the East poured through to the West. The citizens in the West welcomed them with flowers and champagne and a great, spontaneous, citywide street party.<sup>28</sup> The German

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<sup>26</sup> See *The Office of Strategic Services: America's First Intelligence Agency*, CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/oss/index.htm> (accessed February 4, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> President George H. W. Bush. *A Europe Whole and Free*. Remarks to the Citizens in Mainz. Rheingoldhalle. Mainz, Federal Republic of Germany, May 31, 1989.

<sup>28</sup> The author was in Berlin at the Wall early in the morning on November 10, 1989. The previous night East German authorities had allowed East Germans to begin unrestricted crossing to the West. By the morning of November 10<sup>th</sup> East German officials began opening other sections to meet the demand of people wanting to cross over. The author saw how during the whole day the streets of West Berlin filled with East Berliners, who marveled at the shops and cars and had tearful reunions with relatives and old friends in West Berlin. Most went back later the same day to their homes in East Berlin.

people from both sides flooded the streets to embrace each other once again in freedom. The whole dramatic day was observed over live satellite television around the world with much cheering and celebrating. In the following months and years the nations of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics were released from Soviet domination and once again became independent states.

It could be argued that the worldwide broadcast of film footage of the jubilation of a reunited Berlin helped encourage the populations of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union to press even more diligently for reform;<sup>29</sup> conversely, the leaders of the regimes of the East would have been demoralized as they observed the scenes in Berlin. The effect of those images certainly would have been to weaken, to some degree, any resolve for bolstering their power through the system that was on its way out.<sup>30</sup>

### *The End of History?*

The fall of the Soviet empire was the great moment of Western triumph. There was widespread agreement: it was the end of the great twentieth-century struggle between

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<sup>29</sup> This is not to say that the broadcast was intended as a strategic communication effort. In fact, SC is characterized by the U.S. government as a process of “deliberate” actions. The Berlin Wall came down overnight in response to the unexpected great numbers of East Berliners approaching the controlled crossing point, and the authorities made the hasty decision overnight to knock down large openings the wall with heavy bulldozers. In retrospect it is amazing that a type of government known for bureaucratic slowness responded so desisively and with such fateful results. The author was at the Wall early that morning and witnessed the tension and confusion, both on the part of West Berliners curious to see what was happening, and the East German guards unsure how to respond to the confusion of activities happening on both sides of the Wall. By the time the television cameras arrived and were set up to film, the scene was one of a big party, and the most dramatic moments had already happened and were not actually televised.

<sup>30</sup> While the decline of the Soviet system is generally considered to be the result of a gradual process over a period of many decades (often compared to the decline of the Roman Empire), the phenomenon of the Soviet regime’s actual collapse was shockingly sudden. Niall Ferguson, in his fascinating essay (inspired by recent scientific theories of chaos and complexity) proposes an alternative theory on how great powers fall. He also considers the collapse of the Soviet Union to have been triggered by some unplanned event or unexpected sudden shift in the political and social climate. See Niall Ferguson, “Complexity and Collapse: Empires on the Edge of Chaos” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2010, Volume 89, Number 2, 17-32.

the two great powers and the two competing ideologies; it was indeed, as Francis Fukuyama famously posited, the “end of history”: liberal western democracy was the ultimate and unchallenged form of government remaining on the earth.<sup>31</sup>

### ***USIA Dissolved into State***

With the West’s triumph over the Communist ideology of the Soviet Union, the U.S. government’s successful information agency of the Cold War, USIA, found itself without a clear mission. After drifting for a few years while looking for a new purpose, it eventually fell during a round of U.S. government moves to consolidate the bureaucracies of the Cold War. USIA was considered by many by that time to be a relic of the Cold War. In 1999 USIA was abolished and its public diplomacy functions were folded into the State Department.

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<sup>31</sup> Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, Summer 1989, 16 (4). Fukuyama further developed his ideas in his famous 1992 book, which expounds on the ideas from his 1989 essay. See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York, NY: Free Press, 1992.

## **CHAPTER 2: MISTEPS ON THE ROAD TO CHANGING THE U.S. APPROACH TO COMMUNICATIONS**

### **Losing the Arab Street**

#### ***The Muslim World: the new “Target Audience”***

After September 11<sup>th</sup>, Americans asked: “why do they hate us?” and came to the conclusion that the U.S. had not been telling America’s story to the Muslim world. Many assumed: “If they only knew the truth about us, they would love us.” After 9/11 the U.S. government sought to correct its neglect of engaging effectively with the Arab Muslim world. In addition to ordering studies and reports on the state of the government’s public diplomacy functions, the U.S. government took action to leverage the thinking in the private sector. The Bush administration was particularly keen to partner with private industry<sup>1</sup> and it was no surprise that when looking for new ideas on how to engage a target audience, the U.S. government looked to Madison Avenue.<sup>2</sup>

The emphasis was on “the Arab Street” and “angry young Muslims” and indicated a clear public diplomacy mission for the U.S. It was the *public* opinion in those countries that had become a national security challenge for the U.S. After all, within the realm of traditional diplomacy the U.S. had excellent relationships with the governments of the Muslim majority countries where many of the 9/11 terrorists (and other known

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, David L. Seader, (2002) “The United States’ Experience with Outsourcing, Privatization and Public-Private Partnerships,” *The National Council for Public-Private Partnerships*. [www.ncPPP.org/resources/papers/seader\\_usexperience.pdf](http://www.ncPPP.org/resources/papers/seader_usexperience.pdf) (accessed January 27, 2012). “With the ascendancy of the new Bush Administration, whose ideology and economic policies return with force to those of the Reagan ‘80’s, there will be a renewed interest in public-private partnerships of all kinds, and a greater reliance on the private sector in the future.”

<sup>2</sup> Since the 1920s, Madison Avenue, the major north-south avenue in the city of New York where the major advertising companies were established, has been synonymous with America’s advertising industry.

al Qaeda members) came from. Indeed, one of the wider complaints among Arab publics had been the U.S. government's support for authoritarian regimes in the Arab world. Unfortunately, this reality did not seem to factor into the U.S. public diplomacy strategy that took shape in the wake of 9/11. Did the U.S. even understand the concept of "The Arab Street" in 2001? For an explanation on the origin of the term, Brian Palmer reports:

In 2009, professors Terry Regier of U.C. Berkeley and Muhammad Ali Khalidi of York University in Canada published a paper tracking the origins and usage of the phrase Arab street ... They found that Arabic-language newspapers regularly use *the street* as a stand-in for popular public opinion, and not just in reference to Muslims. Journalists in Arab countries also write stories about the mood on the "British street," the "American street," and the "Israeli street."<sup>3</sup>

### ***Selling "Brand America"***

If the "product" was America, then the thinking in the White House at the time was that the best way to "sell" it to the target audience (the Arab street) was to turn to the private sector.<sup>4</sup> The U.S. quickly adopted this approach based on the premise that if it came to promoting America, we should look at Madison Avenue, the capital of commercial advertising, to find the key to selling "Brand America" overseas. If the "brand" had not been selling well, the experts in the advertising industry would figure out how to "re-brand" it and market it to the right audience. Shortly after 9/11 President Bush hired Charlotte Beers, the former chairwoman of the J. Walter Thompson Worldwide advertising agency, to head the U.S public diplomacy campaign for the U.S. government.

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<sup>3</sup> Brian Palmer, "So What's with the Arab Street?" *Slate*, January 31, 2011. [www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/explainer/2011/01/so\\_whats\\_with\\_the\\_arab\\_street.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2011/01/so_whats_with_the_arab_street.html) (accessed May 15, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Victoria de Grazia, "Bush Team Enlists Madison Avenue In War On Terror," *International Herald Tribune*, August 26, 2002.

Beers was committed to applying the best practices of advertising, such as market research and focus groups to “connect with angry young Muslims.”<sup>5</sup>

Charlotte Beers, as the new U.S. Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy, would start the marketing campaign for winning Arab hearts and minds. There was plenty of skepticism regarding the role of an ad executive in such a complex and sensitive government mission.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the U.S. advertising industry was unequaled in its successes commercially, and had succeeded primarily through the mass communications medium of broadcast television, and that is where Beers would begin. With the aim of showing “shared values” between Muslims and America, Beers developed a series of television spots—TV commercials, essentially—targeted at Muslim audiences in the Middle East. These ads depicted happy Muslim-Americans going about their daily lives, freely worshipping their Muslim faith while pursuing the American dream in an open and tolerant society. This approach was criticized as failing to acknowledge the elephant in the public diplomacy room: the fact that the U.S. was at war in a Muslim country (with outrage over civilian casualties) and that U.S. government policy in the Middle East continued to be extremely unpopular among Arabs in the Muslim world.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, these ad campaigns ignored the real problems with the U.S. image and sought to sell the rebranded image of Muslim-friendly America. The ads were not well received by the intended audiences and the campaign was scrapped. One of the biggest criticisms was

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Margaret Carlson, “Can Charlotte Beers Sell Uncle Sam?” *Time Magazine*, November 14, 2001. [www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,184536,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,184536,00.html) (accessed June 6, 2012). Also see Alexandra Starr, “Charlotte Beers’ toughest sale: Can she market America to hostile Muslims abroad?” *Bloomberg Businessweek*, December 17, 2001. [http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/01\\_51/b3762098.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/01_51/b3762098.htm) (accessed June 6, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Sandy Amos, “Selling Brand America: U.S. Public Diplomacy in the Age of Globalization,” *Globalization and Media Blog of New School University*. <http://homepage.newschool.edu/~chakravs/sandy.html> (accessed May 15, 2012).

that the effort was a one-way communication and not an effort to have a dialog with the audience the U.S. sought to win over.<sup>8</sup> Almost every Middle Eastern nation rejected the ads as offensive propaganda and refused to broadcast them. One U.S. academic points out a major flaw in the approach, as critic Sandy Amos observes:

From the outset, there was obvious disconnect between the Beers brand of public diplomacy and the political realities and sensibilities of her target audience. When asked who the symbols or poster people of her campaign would be, Beers responded “Our poster people are President Bush and Secretary Powell: they’re pretty inspiring symbols of the brand, the United States.”<sup>9</sup>

If Middle Eastern audiences are most angry about U.S. foreign policy, why would she propose that the leading figures of established U.S. foreign policy—the U.S. president and his secretary of state—would be the “inspiring symbols of the brand” the U.S. was trying to sell? While government reviews came to the conclusion that the campaign was not successful and new approaches should be pursued, Amos sums it up much more bluntly:

In the end, Charlotte Beers was destined to fail. Her job was the equivalent of branding pork products for Muslim consumption. No one was buying it because it went against his or her most basic beliefs. While the world's leading brands are American, the concept of masking the realities of U.S. foreign policy by marketing them is inherently alienating to foreign audiences.<sup>10</sup>

While Charlotte Beers' campaign was not a total failure—it did raise the profile and momentum of U.S. public diplomacy efforts—she resigned in March 2003, leaving the position of Under-Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy unfilled, once again. As

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<sup>8</sup> See Nancy Snow, “Reweaving Charlotte’s Web,” Published on Friday, December 27, 2002 by CommonDreams.org [www.commondreams.org/views02/1227-05.htm](http://www.commondreams.org/views02/1227-05.htm) (accessed February 4, 2012). “Charlotte’s web emphasizes mostly comfortable distance mass communications, including advertising spots, international radio broadcasting networks and virtual reality tours of American streets. These communications need to be presented as dialogue initiators or else they’ll come across as one-way propaganda vehicles.”

<sup>9</sup> Sandy Amos.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

many commentators would lament, this position remained unencumbered during several periods when the role of PD in U.S. national security was at its most critical in decades.

### ***The Iraq War: a Public Diplomacy Setback***

While worldwide public opinion about the U.S. had been faltering after an initial bout of solidarity and goodwill in response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, it plunged to new depths during the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. It was not only among Muslim populations, but also the governments of many of America's closest allies struggled with declining support for U.S. policies, in particular regarding the Iraq war. In the overview section of a major study based on multiple surveys conducted between 2002 and 2008, involving 54 nations, the Pew report summarizes the decline in attitudes towards the U.S.:

America won a measure of global sympathy after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, but the inaugural Pew Global Attitudes survey showed that by spring 2002 favorability ratings for the U.S. had already dropped in many countries since the start of the decade. Surveys conducted after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 found further declines.<sup>11</sup>

This was certainly a challenging time for U.S. public diplomacy. Not only did the U.S. need to leverage the information pillar of national power in the fight against violent extremism, it had to use information to support the war efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, all while simultaneously winning hearts and minds in the Muslim world. In addition, it had to persuade its allies in Europe and elsewhere to support these efforts, even when their own domestic publics were often furiously opposed to U.S. policies of the Global War on Terrorism. Clearly the mission of U.S. public diplomacy and strategic

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<sup>11</sup> "Global Public Opinion in the Bush Years (2001-2008): America's Image; Muslims and Westerners; Global Economy; Rise of China", *Pew Global Attitudes Project*, Pew Research Center, Released: December 18, 2008, 3.

communication went well beyond polishing up an image (branding) and marketing it (advertising) with one-way messages for a target audience to “buy.”

### **Organizational Confusion and Communication Challenges during the Iraq War**

#### ***Military Information: Information Operations, PSYOP, and Public Affairs***

Information Operations (IO) and Psychological Operations (PSYOP) are traditional functions within U.S. military practice. Both are traditionally limited to the battlefield—or theater of operations—and both are essentially directed against the adversary. These functions have been explicitly kept separated from the military public affairs (PA) function in order to retain the credibility of the U.S. military’s public statements made through PA, i.e., they are not tainted with anything relating to deception, misinformation, or other psychological manipulations associated with warfare. Even though only a very narrow range of activities in Psyops are actually devoted to deception, there remains a lingering suspicion of the IO functions as being a new manifestation of propaganda, and the U.S. military has deliberately kept these functions in separate organizational structures from public affairs functions. The U.S. military emphasizes that its public affairs must be “first with the truth,” emphasized by General Petraeus as integral to U.S. COIN strategy.<sup>12</sup> PA coordinates with the independent media to provide official U.S. government information and statements relating to U.S. military policies and operations. The U.S. military also publishes its own content through U.S. sponsored media such as newsletters and websites. These publications are for both internal (U.S.

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<sup>12</sup> David H. Petraeus, "Multi-National Force Commander's Counterinsurgency Guidance," *Military Review* (September–October 2008), 210–212. Quoted by Thomas D. Mayfield III, "A Commander's Strategy for Social Media," *NDU Press*, issue 60, 1st quarter 2011, 80.

forces) and to external U.S. public audiences (to inform them of U.S. military activities and to build support for U.S. military programs).

Traditionally (since the end of WWII) the information functions of the military have operated along their own respective lines of effort (PA and IO) and are organized under separate chains of command within DoD structures. These organizational structures are reflected in the separate information structures of an operational command for a theater of war. Similarly, U.S. civilian information operations overseas are the responsibility of the Department of State (formerly handled by USIA) and traditionally run quite separately from military information operations.

In spite of the traditionally clear and separate lines of operation of U.S. military and civilian information functions, there was considerable confusion of these lines during the Iraq war. A December 2003 New York Times article was already covering this theme, which would become increasingly problematic during the war:

Public diplomacy is “a complete and utter disaster in Iraq,” said Mark Helmke, a senior staff member on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who holds that the occupation authority has done little to counter criticism that it is an imperial, occupying force. “We have four different agencies running media operations there. There’s no coordination, no strategy.”<sup>13</sup>

Mr. Helmke’s criticism is perhaps a bit unfair, as the military has been required to maintain separate information operations; and civilian and military public affairs and influence activities also have traditionally operated separately. So it is natural that neither would be aware of—or coordinate with—what the others are doing. These separations

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher Marquis, “Effort to Promote U.S. Falls Short, Critics Say,” *New York Times*, December 29, 2003. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/29/world/effort-to-promote-us-falls-short-critics-say.html> (accessed February 20, 2012).

come from U.S. legislation and organizational policies. When all U.S. efforts are concentrated on a single theater of operations without coordination, it is only natural that there is going to be confusion and blurring of the separate lanes of responsibility once information content enters into any media stream, especially the internet. In the modern, globalized information age, these separations become almost meaningless, as all information, regardless of where it originates, will quickly find its way into electronic media, the internet and satellite television.

### ***An Info Ops Media Scandal in Iraq***

This new reality about the information environment might be one reason why those traditional lines were blurred in the now infamous scandal involving the U.S. military and the contractor, the Lincoln Group. Los Angeles Times reporter Mark Mazzatti broke the story in 2005 about U.S. troops writing stories that were planted in Iraqi media to appear as if they had been reported by independent Iraqi journalists. In his article he refers to this blurring of boundaries:

The arrangement with Lincoln Group is evidence of how far the Pentagon has moved to blur the traditional boundaries between military public affairs -- the dissemination of factual information to the media -- and psychological and information operations, which use propaganda and sometimes misleading information to advance the objectives of a military campaign.<sup>14</sup>

This blurring of boundaries can lead to confusion between Psyops, IO, and PA activities. Military Psyops can sometimes uses deception, but the targeted audience is the adversary in the operational battlespace. In today's information environment, there are

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<sup>14</sup> Mark Mazzatti, "U.S. Military Covertly Pays to Run Stories in Iraqi Press," *Los Angeles Times*, November 30, 2005.

many unintended audiences. While many military and civilian officials are cautious about the danger of just such mishaps, the U.S. government signaled its intention to leverage the maximum effects possible through strategic communications. U.S. doctrine calls for “synchronizing” *all* U.S. government themes, messages and actions. That leaves quite a bit of room for misunderstanding and confusion as to what exactly is an allowed activity and what is not. It should be noted that strategic communication was an emerging concept in U.S. military operations at the time of the Iraq war, and there was not yet a well-developed strategic communication doctrine. Even now, in government policy documents, the strategic communication concept is not clearly linked to specific tactical activities, which are the type that dominate most of the military’s traditional information functions.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, military planning for operational activities and specific lines of operation (such as information) takes place at the operational headquarters level, and is not always coherently linked back up to the strategic level. With all of these conditions as a background, it is not surprising that the Lincoln Group information operation mishap occurred.

In the days following the report of the story, there was confusion as to whether any U.S. laws had actually been broken. While some debated the legality of the actions, there was broader concern across government that planting “fake” stories in the Iraqi media directly contradicted President Bush’s stated U.S. strategy for Iraq, which included

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<sup>15</sup> However, there is increasing consensus that strategic communication applies to all levels of military activity, including the tactical level. This is often referred to as the phenomenon of the “strategic corporal.” See for example, Major Lynda Liddy, “The Strategic Corporal: Some Requirements in Training and Education,” *Australian Army Journal* 11, no. 2 (Autumn 2005), 139-48. Kevin Stringer makes the case that the strategic corporal represents a paradigm shift which requires new approaches to military training. See, Kevin D. Stringer, Ph.D., “Educating the Strategic Corporal: A Paradigm Shift,” *Military Review*, September-October 2009. Reprinted in United States Army Combined Arms Center website: [http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/call/docs/11-20/ch\\_8.asp](http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/call/docs/11-20/ch_8.asp) (accessed February 20, 2012).

the need to support a “free, independent and responsible Iraqi media.”<sup>16</sup> The implied consequence of this contradiction was that any short-term positive effects the stories might have had on a local Iraqi population would be quickly undone; furthermore, there would be broader and longer-lasting negative effects due to the loss of credibility and the detrimental effects on the U.S. and Iraqi efforts to create a legitimate media sector in that country, as a free and responsible press is an essential component of a democratic society. There could be even wider-ranging and longer-lasting negative effects as the implications of the story spreads to U.S. and foreign audiences, where such a story could reinforce negative assumptions about the U.S., which would undermine support for U.S. policies.

### ***Military Information Operations and Nation Building***

Developing the media sector is a fundamental part of nation building. At the start of the Iraq war, the U.S. military had not engaged in actual nation building since the end of WWII. Many officials and analysts thought it was not an appropriate activity for the U.S. military. For example, in a 2004 article Fukuyama observes:

The Pentagon, which lacked the institutional knowledge or capacity to do many of the things that need to be done in reconstruction, did not turn to the right places ... It does not have good relations with the international NGOs that provide humanitarian services; nor does it have a way of coordinating activities with the UN and other multilateral institutions.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Lolita Baldor, “Pentagon propaganda an effort to “get the truth out,” *Associated Press*, printed in the *Seattle Times*, December 2, 2005. [http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/politics/2002660427\\_webiragnews02.html](http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/politics/2002660427_webiragnews02.html) (accessed February 20, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Francis Fukuyama, “Nation-Building 101,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, January/February 2004. <http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/2004/01/fukuyama.htm> (accessed February 22, 2012). Fukuyama points out that the Pentagon under Secretary Rumsfeld fought to be the lead U.S. agency for reconstruction in Iraq in order to avoid having to contend with the State Department’s different ideas and approaches. However, with the lead on reconstruction, the military was ill-equipped to handle that job.

At the beginning of his first term, President Bush was opposed to using U.S. troops for nation building, though later made a complete reversal in the effort to re-make Iraq into a model of Arab democracy for the Middle East. Regarding the type of programs to build up democratic institutions and civil society in an emerging democracy, the State Department would be very familiar with the strategies for developing civil society and institutions to support democracy (such as developing a free and independent press that adheres to profession standards of journalism). The Department of Defense, on the other hand, had much less expertise in dealing with these issues, and operational level planners would be even less connected to these issues on a day-to-day basis. Dealing with the development of the media sector—beyond traditional public affairs activities—was not something that would normally be handled by the military; it fell squarely within State or USAID's purview. But in the Iraq war, the U.S. military was tasked with the whole range of nation-building activities, and was often in charge of capacity-building projects in fields where they themselves lacked capacity. As Fukuyama states, the Defense Department "...does not have any particular expertise ... producing attractive TV programs to compete with Al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya for the hearts and minds of Arab viewers."<sup>18</sup>

Nation building and counterinsurgency missions require complex operations and extensive coordination across many fields and many actors. In a theater of war, where effective strategic communication is arguably most needed, there is the potential problem of the overall effort being dominated by the military<sup>19</sup> and failing to appropriately

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>19</sup> To be fair, it was not only the military that missed the strategic communication effects of actions that contradicted stated U.S. values or aims. For example, in 2004 civilian administrator L. Paul Bremer actually made the decision to shut down *Al Hawza*, an Iraqi newspaper suspected of publishing

leverage the expertise of other U.S. agencies as well as other international and host country actors. Strategic communication doctrine calls for synchronizing all U.S. government words, deeds, and images. But any synchronization will depend on “who’s in charge” and that remains a question that has not been fully resolved. The reason for the “scandal” with the media project in Iraq looks more and more like a case of organizational confusion than any illegitimate agenda or inappropriate content.

It could be argued that the U.S. mishandled every aspect of its information effort during the Iraq war. It failed to engage positively with the wider Muslim audiences, who grew angrier with the U.S. and less supportive of the “war on terror” as the Iraq war unfolded. It also failed to keep its own allies bolstered with positive strategic communication, when, for example, misdeeds such as those portrayed in the images of Abu Ghraib scandal trumped any positive images and messages the U.S. could put forward for its purpose in Iraq. In addition, it failed to effectively coordinate and synchronize a coherent strategic communication strategy among the different U.S. government agencies operating in Iraq. These failures contributed to a loss of U.S. credibility among the various audiences, and caused a loss of confidence that the U.S. was capable of communicating effectively and strategically with any unity of effort in a whole of government approach.

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lies that would inciting violence against coalition troops, even though U.S. troops were the ones seen closing and locking shut the newspaper's offices. See Jeffery Gettleman's article, "G.I.'s Padlock Baghdad Paper Accused of Lies," *New York Times*, March 29, 2004. [www.nytimes.com/2004/03/29/world/gi-s-padlock-baghdad-paper-accused-of-lies.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/29/world/gi-s-padlock-baghdad-paper-accused-of-lies.html). In the international press, a BBC article the same day goes further: not only is the story reported as the U.S. exhibiting hypocrisy against its own professed democratic values, but by closing the Shite-run newspaper Bremer was accused by Iraqis of following in Saddam's footsteps and being anti-Shia." See, "Iraqi outcry as US bans newspaper" *BBC News*, March 29, 2004. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3578183.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3578183.stm) (accessed February 22 , 2012).

## **CHAPTER 3: CLOSING THE CIV-MIL GAP IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN**

### **Civilian and Military Coordination: Initial Efforts in Iraq**

#### ***The Need to Integrate Civilian and Military Efforts***

During the urgent times of war the U.S. government has historically been willing and able to concentrate massive resources towards the cause of the country's mission. The U.S. campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan involved massive spending and occupied the central focus of all the pillars of national power. In addition to leveraging a great many resources, the U.S. has focused considerable energies to studying best practices and probing cases of mistakes and failures in the effort to update and evolve its strategies with the goal of winning the nation's wars. Ideally these reviews could be conducted in a cycle that is fast enough to improve our efforts on the ground in the current campaigns.

There is a natural tension between the need for quickly implementing necessary changes and the need for coherence and continuity in how the mission is carried out. These complex, multi-year missions with simultaneous combat, counterinsurgency and nation-building operations require sustained collaboration with host nation officials and other local and international actors. Some of these actors become frustrated, for example, when their U.S. counterpart is re-deployed at the end of their tour—sometimes not long after finally establishing trust and figuring out how to work together on shared problems. Then a new person is assigned and takes over the predecessor's position, sometimes with little or no orientation or any meaningful briefing in country for that role regarding how to engage with the local contacts, or what otherwise unexpected issues or problems they should be aware of. In short, the lessons learned by their predecessor may be lost and the new person starts from scratch. In a culture where relationships and trust can be more

important than position or rank, this can become an area where U.S. government efforts are seriously hampered. Rapid turnover in U.S. Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) personnel is also cited as a factor in driving the often hasty and poorly conceived reconstruction projects that, while initially intended to create goodwill among local Afghans, ended up causing longer-term problems.<sup>20</sup>

### ***A New Counterinsurgency Doctrine***

While there have been problems associated with constant turnover in U.S. personnel as they rotate through on six-month or one-year tours, there is also, arguably, a benefit in having new information and fresh ideas and energy that new people bring to devote to the ongoing mission. Notwithstanding the loss of continuity and trust in some relationships, there is the idea that one must not squander the opportunity that comes with a “fresh start.” As the mission and the strategy kept evolving in Afghanistan, there was a need to do many things differently and adopt new approaches to achieve the mission’s goals. In addition, there was a growing wealth of information and analysis on both wars, and much of that started to feed back into the effort from the earliest days. This dynamic falls within the established military practice of reassessing the strategic and operational environments,<sup>21</sup> a critical process for refining the strategy and for the operational success of the mission. General Petraeus’ approach to counterinsurgency would emphasize that iterative reassessment process to constantly adapt to the operational environment.

One of the transformations that took place in both wars was the creation of an integrated civilian-military campaign. Integrating civilian and military efforts was critical

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<sup>20</sup> Robert M. Perito, “U. S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan,” *Special Report*, United States Institute of Peace, Number 152, October 2005, 9.

<sup>21</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Operation Planning (JP 5-0)* August 2011, Chapter III, 8-9.

in both wars. In Iraq, after security conditions deteriorated dramatically in 2006, the U.S. needed to reassess its strategy. In January 2007 President Bush announced a new strategy for Iraq, focused on protecting and securing the Iraqi population and supporting the effort with a surge of civilian and military resources. He also announced changes in senior leadership for the U.S. mission in Iraq, nominating General David Petraeus as the commanding general and Ambassador Ryan Crocker as the U.S. Chief of Mission in Baghdad. Both Petraeus and Crocker saw the way forward in Iraq through a new approach, one that would unite civilian and military efforts; in fact, the new strategy itself was based on a comprehensive approach that both men were determined to implement. Petraeus himself had spearheaded the development of a new counter-insurgency (COIN) doctrine that would form the foundation of the new U.S. strategy for Iraq. While their predecessors in Iraq (General Casey and Ambassador Khalilzad) had begun to emphasize civilian-military coordination, they really had only been working it at the highest level of leadership; they had still not effectively coordinated their own staffs, let alone the civilian and military efforts at the middle and lower levels of operations.<sup>22</sup> The new strategy sought to coordinate and align civilian and military efforts at all levels, which was a big challenge for many reasons.

By June 2007, the new U.S. COIN guidance was released and its principles would be implemented under the command of General Petraeus in Iraq. One of its main concepts was “unity of effort” and in particular the integration of civilian and military

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<sup>22</sup> Joint Center for Operational Analysis, U.S. Joint Forces Command, *Operation Iraqi Freedom, January 2007 to December 2008 - The Comprehensive Approach: an Iraq Case Study*, February 16, 2010 (unclassified report), 3.

activities. In the Joint Forces report on the results of the new strategy in Iraq during 2007, it emphasized the main theme of the strategy:

One of the key “big ideas” was the alignment of civilian and military efforts in a coordinated approach to combating the insurgency. The *improved* civil-military partnership brought all elements of national power to the tasks of protecting the population, attacking insurgent networks, and building the legitimacy of the GOI.<sup>23</sup> (my emphasis)

The COIN guidance explicitly instructed field personnel (who often operate in areas with few civilians in relation to military personnel) to make an effort to integrate civilians into all activities from planning to implementation. Meanwhile, in Baghdad, the new commander and ambassador made a visible effort to appear as a “unified front” taking every opportunity to appear side-by-side at meetings, press conferences, etc., in order to emphasize the unity of effort of their mission. While not stated explicitly, those joint appearances of the civilian and military senior leaders were another example of strategic communication—in this case to inform and motivate U.S. personnel to help them carry out the new strategy.

One of the important steps forward in the process of creating unity of effort was creating a plan that would support a unified effort. In 2007 a planning team of civilian and military members came to Iraq to work on plans to support the new strategy. Their work led to the Joint Campaign Plan and then Unified Common Plans with integrated objectives and tasks for the their local environments.<sup>24</sup> These efforts in Iraq developed new expertise and approaches to integrating civilian and military efforts. While there were still many challenges imposed by the different organizational cultures, some of the lessons learned included a new mindset and interpersonal skills to reduce the friction

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 4.

inherent in the different agencies.<sup>25</sup> The new strategy in Iraq was considered to be a success. Most reports emphasize the key to success was the surge in troop numbers, but it is also important to note that the integrated civilian-military approach was fundamental to the new strategy. While there were still obstacles and challenges for coordinating civilian and military activities, especially in the complex and often confusing area of information and strategic communication, the U.S. would pursue what had worked before the next time it was involved in fighting a counterinsurgency.

### **Civilian and Military Coordination: Increased Momentum in Afghanistan**

#### ***U.S. Attention Turns Back to Afghanistan***

The war in Afghanistan did not start out as a counterinsurgency. After the initial routing of the Taliban in 2001, it became a stabilization and reconstruction mission, with an emphasis on establishing security in Kabul, so that a new Afghan government could be set up in the capital. In 2002 there were signs that an insurgency was brewing in the southern provinces and by 2006 the Taliban had re-emerged as a major threat, with growing momentum as security deteriorated over large areas of the country. NATO was in charge of combat operations at that time, but without a full U.S. effort there could not have been any significant change in the direction of the mission.

It is widely agreed that the U.S. did not respond to the situation in Afghanistan at that time because it was focusing its resources and political will so heavily on Iraq. In any case, by 2008 the candidate Barak Obama made a renewed focus on the war in Afghanistan a theme of his campaign. When President Obama took office in 2009 he began an intense review of the war strategy that would last most of 2009. Once again the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 5.

U.S. would debate which course to take to salvage a war that was going badly. Once again, the U.S. would respond with an enhanced COIN strategy and a civilian and military surge. Once again there would be a major effort to integrate civilian and military activities as a key to a COIN strategy.

### ***An Integrated Civilian-Military Plan for Afghanistan***

In 2009 the U.S. government created the integrated civilian-military plan for the Afghanistan campaign, which emphasized communications in alignment with the overall civ-mil campaign plan (ICMCP). The ICMCP identified 13 separate objectives; however there were a few “crosscutting” objectives, which were determined to be of such great importance to the overall strategy that every objective and line of effort had to address them. “Information” was one of those three crosscutting objectives.<sup>26</sup>

Another complementary U.S. plan gave further detailed coordination just for the communications efforts. Known as the "Blue Plan," it mapped out all the different objectives, lines of effort, tasks and division of responsibilities for all communications related efforts among the U.S. Embassy, USAID, ISAF and U.S. Forces in Afghanistan to be coordinated and executed throughout Afghanistan.<sup>27</sup> The U.S. Embassy established a Director of Strategic Communications and Public Diplomacy, a new, essentially ambassador-level position above the traditional Public Affairs Officer level of responsibility. The U.S. government, in an act that could be interpreted as a sign of how

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<sup>26</sup> Karl W. Eikenberry and Stanley A. McChrystal, *United States Government Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan for Support to Afghanistan*, August 2009, 6.

<sup>27</sup> The author worked with the Blue Plan while serving as a Public Diplomacy officer at the U.S. embassy in Kabul in 2010-2011. At that time the Blue Plan was an internal document, not for distribution, and as of the time of this writing, does not appear to be available to the public. In addition, the author, in coordination with the Political-Military section of the U.S. Embassy Kabul, edited the ICMCP for eventual release to the public.

critical and urgent the communications effort was to the mission, looked outside of its own ranks and hired David Ensor, seasoned CNN security correspondent and more recently a corporate executive, for this role. (Upon concluding his assignment in Afghanistan in 2011, Ensor was hired as director of Voice of America.) Within the Public Affairs Section of the embassy a Strategic Communication unit was established, overseen by Ensor but managed day-to-day by a U.S. Army colonel, which included civilian as well as military experts in the communications field, working along side regular State Department personnel. The “StratCom unit,” as it was known, worked closely with counterparts at ISAF headquarters and throughout the country on efforts to counter the insurgents’ messages and momentum in the information arena through a wide range of activities including sports and television, film, entertainment, outreach to Afghan government ministries, tribal and religious leaders, and initiatives on other creative and experimental projects and programs.<sup>28</sup>

A noteworthy example of U.S. strategic communication in Afghanistan was the television series titled “Eagle Four,” which was broadcast on Afghan TV in 2010. The action-filled police drama featured a story line about Afghan police officers that courageously took on Taliban terrorists, drug lords and corrupt government officials, while upholding a high standard of professionalism. While not a covert project, there was an effort for the U.S. involvement in its creation to keep a low profile. All the actors were Afghans and it was produced by an Afghan team and aired by a popular Afghan TV channel (Tolo TV). Nonetheless, once the story broke in the media that the show was funded by the U.S. embassy, there was some buzz in the international media insinuating

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<sup>28</sup> Maria Abi-Habib, “U.S. Courts Afghans Through Television,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 17, 2010. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703628204575618573846693534.html> (accessed June 6, 2012).

“Eagle Four” was merely a propaganda piece. David Ensor explained to New York Times Kabul-based correspondent Rod Nordland that the show was meant to help develop capacity in the television and media sector, while at the same time reinforcing positive images for the Afghans: the police officers on the show were a positive example of Afghans who were making the effort, in the face of many challenges, to do the right thing. At the same time it encouraged Afghans to take pride in the efforts of those fellow Afghans who have a dangerous job while trying to provide security. Even though the TV show was fiction, it reflected real issues and concerns. Additionally, the resources provided to the Afghan talent and media industry helped develop that niche of the sector. When asked if it was meant to be training or propaganda, Ensor replied unapologetically, “it’s a bit of both... To help build capacity in the nascent Afghan film and TV industry, and if it sets a standard for police work that is something to aspire to, great.”<sup>29</sup>

While the U.S. embassy funded film and TV and other creative projects, the very same themes and messages were the basis for information operations and Psyop efforts conducted by the military. They were all working off the same plan, and acting according to their own roles and authorities to determine the appropriate activities. It must be stressed that the physical proximity in Kabul of the civilian and military headquarters—the U.S. Embassy in this case and ISAF HQ—allowed civilian officials and military personnel working from this common plan (sometimes in the same office space) to have daily discussions and informal collaboration. Therefore, there was greater understanding at the headquarters level of the strategic concepts and operational applications and across civilian and military information activities.

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<sup>29</sup> Rod Nordland, “On TV, an Afghan Unit Tackles the Taliban,” *The New York Times*, November 20, 2010. [www.nytimes.com/2010/11/21/world/asia/21kabul.html?pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/21/world/asia/21kabul.html?pagewanted=all) (accessed February 27, 2012).

Another important fact about the ICMCP is that in addition to providing a framework specifically for coordinating U.S. civilian and military efforts, the plan at the same time reflects a broader coordination of strategic direction, and an implicit “unity of effort” among all stakeholders: The plan was developed in consultation with the UN, the Afghan government, and other international stakeholders involved in developing the strategic framework for Afghanistan. This is highlighted in the GAO report to Congress on the U.S. for Afghanistan:

The ICMCP (August 2009), signed by the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan and the commanding general, U.S. Forces, Afghanistan, was developed collaboratively by the U.S. agencies working in Afghanistan, the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan, ISAF, the government of Afghanistan, and other partner nations. The plan provides guidance for U.S. personnel in Afghanistan and lays out a counterinsurgency campaign to secure and support the Afghan people and government. The plan calls for integrated civilian and military teams to address lines of effort by working on 11 specific efforts called transformative effects.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> United States Government Accountability Office, *The Strategic Framework for U.S. Efforts in Afghanistan*, (GAO-10-655R) June 15, 2010, 6.

## **CHAPTER 4: EMERGING POLICIES AND CHANGING STRUCTURES**

### **U.S. and NATO Strategic Communications**

#### *Overview*

As discussed in the previous chapter, the U.S. has been able to employ a certain degree of flexibility in its PD and SC activities in the field during recent and current theaters of war. In addition to integrating civilian and military efforts, the U.S. made considerable resources available for communications activities to support the war efforts. In these exceptional circumstances, the U.S. provided funding for communications well over the peacetime levels. In the time-sensitive context of a government pressing to reverse a perceived loss of momentum and political support, there was greater opportunity to exercise flexibility, adapt creatively to new situations, and experiment with new structures for cooperation and command and control. At the same time, national-level policy-making was keeping up an intensive pace, trying to bring U.S. national policies into line with the current strategic challenges.

#### *NATO Reform and Strategic Communications*

The U.S. effort in Afghanistan, while a challenge for coordinating civilian and military efforts, was also coordinated as part of a coalition. NATO took over combat operations in 2006. The U.S. formed the largest part of the NATO alliance (with U.S. Special Forces operating under a strictly U.S. command structure), and along with other partners made up the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) coalition. ISAF, commanded by NATO, also took on a significant civilian mission, establishing the position of the NATO Senior Civilian Representative (NATO SCR), the civilian counterpart to the NATO military commander (COMISAF). NATO has a civilian

(political) headquarters in Brussels (NATO HQ), and a military headquarters—Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE)—in Mons, Belgium. The NATO Secretary General leads the political headquarters and is NATO's symbolic head as Chairman of the North Atlantic Council (NAC), the highest deliberative body of the NATO alliance. The military headquarters is led by the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), who commands all NATO military operations. The SACEUR, however, reports to the NAC on NATO's operational issues. While most people think of NATO primarily as a military organization, the overall head of the organization is embodied in the civilian Secretary General, with the military commanders subordinate (through reporting to the NAC) to him—a reflection of the structural model of a civilian head of state in a member country as the commander in chief over the military forces of that country.<sup>1</sup>

The civilian (or political-military) dimension of NATO has grown increasingly important in today's complex world. Not only has NATO membership grown from twelve member countries to twenty-eight, the more recent members have different histories and different economic issues and aspirations. The increasing diversity within NATO brings increasing complexity in dealing with the divergent interests and capabilities—both within the organization, and in relation to other nations. With a history of integrating its original members for the purpose of a common security during the Cold War, the alliance took on additional members with the additional challenges of integrating more nations, different political backgrounds and a greater range of perspectives and cultures applied to the alliance's decision-making bodies.

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<sup>1</sup> See organizational structure of NATO on official NATO website:  
<http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-D4BDCE0F-1792F6E3/natolive/structure.htm>

During the same 2009-2010 timeframe that the U.S. was reassessing its policies and security strategies, NATO also conducted a reassessment. NATO's existing strategic concept and *raison d' etre* was becoming more uncertain and complicated as it aspired to take on a greater range of missions. At the 2010 Lisbon Summit, NATO formally adopted its new strategic concept.<sup>2</sup> A major European study of the new strategic concept clearly points out the greater importance the strategy assigns to public diplomacy and strategic communications.<sup>3</sup> In the introduction to the comprehensive analysis of the document, the authors highlight the significant differences in relation to NATO's previous strategy. The authors emphasize that, "Perhaps most importantly the document conveys a collective intention to push NATO further in the direction of global engagement."<sup>4</sup> After going on to outline the other key new points (such as the core role of political consultations with a wide range of actors, and the unconventional and transnational nature of the current global threats), again the authors conclude, "Finally, it is an alliance cognisant of public diplomacy and of the vital role played by strategic narratives."<sup>5</sup>

The ideas and debates that led to the new strategic concept had been emerging over several years, in parallel with the post 9/11 changes in international security and in the security environment. Just as the U.S. government reassessed its approach to strategic communication, the new environment would have a significant impact on NATO's strategic communications mission.

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<sup>2</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO's New Strategic Concept, Released November 19, 2012. <http://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/index.html> (accessed April 4, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Jens Ringsmose and Sten Rynning (eds.) *NATO's New Strategic Concept. A Comprehensive Assessment*, (DIIS Report 2011:02), Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2011. [http://books.google.com/books?id=Alg2pjMBUwcC&printsec=frontcover&dq=inauthor:%22Jens+Ringsmose+and+Sten+Rynning+\(eds\)%22&hl=en&sa=X&ei=0d5kT62\\_KurUsgKet-C2Dw&ved=0CDAQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=Alg2pjMBUwcC&printsec=frontcover&dq=inauthor:%22Jens+Ringsmose+and+Sten+Rynning+(eds)%22&hl=en&sa=X&ei=0d5kT62_KurUsgKet-C2Dw&ved=0CDAQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false) (accessed March 11, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 8.

In the case of Afghanistan, the NATO/ISAF mission provides an example of how the information strategy and operational lines of effort evolved to meet the challenges of a changing mission. First let us reflect on the recent history of change and reform within the NATO alliance.

Like all alliances in history, NATO has been going through varying degrees of reshaping and reform since it was established following the end of World War II. Recently there has been a greater urgency to reform NATO due to shrinking defense budgets of member nations, and the great changes in both the threat environment and indeed the discussion among member nations as to what the role and mission of NATO itself should be since the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The most notable moment heralding the refocus on NATO's role and mission happened in two stages: in the mid 1990s it used force for the first time and moved "out of area" with its intervention in the Balkans—against the Serbians over Bosnia, then against the Serbians over Kosovo. The next stage with regard to its refocusing arrived in 2001: NATO instituted Article V for the first time in the alliance's history in response to the 9/11 attacks on the United States; and then in 2003, NATO took command of the ISAF mission. On one hand it was a clear signal of NATO's significance as an instrument of collective defense, while ironically it was actually in response to an attack on the United States' homeland, and not, as originally envisioned, on a European member nation's soil. It was the first NATO campaign conducted outside of Europe. This followed an intense debate about the purpose of NATO. The other game-changing aspect of the Afghanistan mission was the further extension of NATO's out of area role. NATO leaders concluded that major threats could come from anywhere and not just next-door.

So they needed a NATO capable of going to the problem globally, before it came to them. As a precedent, the Afghanistan campaign both strengthens the argument for NATO's role within a broader, global concept, while also calling into question its continued existence since its original implicit purpose of defending Europe from the threat of Soviet aggression.

In 2003, two years after what had been considered a quick combat victory over the Taliban regime, NATO took over authority of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission to Afghanistan. Since 2003 the mission there has evolved from one of securing the capital Kabul, so that a new government could be established, to one of taking over increasing responsibility for security for the entire country, and eventually into a full-blown counterinsurgency war. The original mission has grown, changed and continued much longer than any of the NATO member nations expected, or even were prepared to commit to. The demand for continued support of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan over a ten-year period has caused many, if not all NATO nations to reassess their level of participation in the mission, and what, if any, combat support in terms of additional troops and other efforts they were willing and able to provide. Some nations have risen to the occasion and proved to be staunch and valued members of the alliance, while others have struggled with domestic criticism of involvement in the war in Afghanistan and calls for reducing commitments to NATO. The Dutch government, for example, suffered a political crisis due to heated debates over these issues and their coalition government eventually collapsed under the strain.<sup>6</sup> (Nevertheless, the Dutch did

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<sup>6</sup> NRC Handelsblad Staff, "The High Price of the Political Crisis," *Spiegel Online International*, February 22, 2012. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/dutch-government-collapse-the-high-price-of-the-political-crisis-a-679433.html> (accessed June 6, 2012). "The government of Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende fell apart early on Saturday morning after the coalition could not find unity

fulfill and active combat role in the south, although now they have transformed that into a police mission in the relatively safer north of Afghanistan.) The German government—and public—had to grapple with the emerging reality that this was not just a peacekeeping mission, but a real war requiring real combat, an action Germans have shunned since the end of WWII. However, as NATO members the Germans eventually embraced this painful responsibility and did begin to expand their activities to more than peacekeeping—even to the detriment of its minister of defense when a German commander called in an air strike on an insurgent-hijacked fuel tanker near Kunduz that resulted in many Afghan civilian casualties.<sup>7</sup> For the Dutch government and the German ministry of defense, they faced serious political consequences in the face of their own domestic public opinion increasingly critical of participating in the war. Most of the criticism came as a response to dramatic media reports and other forms of sensational information coming out of Afghanistan, as opposed to principled debate about role of their nations' military forces or NATO membership. Information increasingly became the most volatile realm of the war and the most challenging aspect of NATO's mission.

### ***NATO's Evolving Mission in Afghanistan***

NATO's mission in Afghanistan evolved into more than securing that conflict-ridden country; The ISAF mission also became—arguably—a mission to prove NATO's relevance in the 21st century. Amid some calls to disband or defend NATO, a failure in Afghanistan could be a swan song for the NATO alliance.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, a successfully

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on the future of the country's Afghanistan mission. The crisis shows how deep the divides were within Balkenende's cabinet."

<sup>7</sup> Craig Whitlock, "Germany in Political Turmoil Over Ordering of Deadly Airstrike in Afghanistan," *The Washington Post*, September 8, 2009. [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/07/AR2009090702224.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/07/AR2009090702224.html) (accessed June 6, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Tarn D. Warren, "ISAF and Afghanistan: The Impact of Failure on NATO's Future," *Joint Forces*

concluded mission (if not an all-out victory) would ensure NATO's relevance as the free world's premiere security alliance and political-military organization with unique further empowered diplomatic as well as military capabilities.

This challenge also leads to the application of Strategic Communication, and how to organize information efforts at the political level (to maintain the will of the alliance) as well as the strategic and operational for the military campaign itself. Like the U.S. military, NATO has separate Information Operations and Psychological Operations disciplines (sometimes organized under the categories of "inform" and "influence" activities at the theater level). The conventional military practices of Information Operations (IO) and Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) had been the domain of military professionals in a theater of military (kinetic) operations, and primarily directed against the enemy on or near the battlefield. Their purpose was well defined, limited to the theater of operations, and carried out by specialists within their own ranks. Strategic Communication evolved out of a sense among senior leadership in NATO that the various information disciplines were not delivering what was needed.<sup>9</sup>

As the world of communications has changed, and as the conduct of warfare has changed (in this case a counterinsurgency carried out by a large alliance of over 40 nations and with a 24/7 news cycle—also referred to as the "CNN effect") the communications function has expanded to the point where it is almost impossible to

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*Quarterly*, Issue 59, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, 2010, 1. Also see Marco Vincenzino, who says, "Put simply, what is at stake will impact national security, international stability and future generations for the US and its allies. Many need reminding that 9/11 largely emanated from Afghanistan, and that the area continues to pose a regional and international threat." Marco Vincenzo, "The public in the West has to buy into Afghanistan - and soon," *NATO Review*, October 22, 2008.

[www.nato.int/docu/review/2008/06/SUMMER\\_ART3/EN/index.htm](http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2008/06/SUMMER_ART3/EN/index.htm) (accessed June 6, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Inci Kucukaksoy, "Power of Information: Interview with Mark Laity, Chief of Strategic Communications, SHAPE," *The Three Swords*, NATO Joint Warfare Center, Stavanger, Norway, Issue number 21, Autumn/Winter 2011, 20.

categorize. Ultimately, every social, political, military and cultural act has a communication dimension and a positive or negative effect within the context of such a complex mission as the current one in Afghanistan. That includes communications among and between coalition partners, the host government, the Afghan population, the various hostile groups and insurgent elements, regional powers, and worldwide audiences. Moreover, an overwhelming range of images, video, film, reports, messages of all kinds (i.e., actions, words, and deeds) are broadcast and communicated almost instantly in the electronically connected and globalized information environment.

At the same time that NATO was trying to figure out how to cope with the information aspects of the mission, it was becoming increasingly obvious that the enemy in the insurgency—principally the Taliban—was way ahead in the game of communicating strategically. This has also been documented by many analysts and has provoked a crisis in the IO/Psyops and public affairs and public diplomacy communities in NATO and the U.S. government—both in the Department of Defense as well as the State Department. Meanwhile, according to NATO Chief of Strategic Communications Mark Laity, “practitioners still remained ambivalent about StratCom and its impact on their particular disciplines, and they (the leaders) sought to make the specialists, who were still ambivalent about StratCom, adapt their strategies and capabilities.”<sup>10</sup>

Parallel to the events on the U.S. side in the development of the new integrated civ-mil communications plan (a significant demonstration of the importance the U.S. government assigned to communications in the Iraq and Afghanistan missions), NATO was developing its first Strategic Communications policy. In 2008 a Strategic Communications cell was created in Mons at SHAPE, headed by a new position, Chief

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Laity, telephone interview with the author, January 27, 2012.

Strategic Communications (StratCom), whose role was to oversee the development of new strategic communication policy and strategies for NATO's worldwide military operations. Mark Laity became NATO's first Chief StratCom. He had been the NATO civilian spokesperson in Afghanistan during 2006-2007 and most of 2008, and had had other communications roles in efforts related to Afghanistan as Chief of Public Information at SHAPE for several years before that. Laity had been BBC defense correspondent before serving as special advisor to NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson, marking a trend of high-level government officials recruiting experienced media professionals to serve as media advisors, press officers, or spokespersons.

The timeframe suggests that NATO officials closely follow the trends picked up by the U.S. military and make every possible effort to stay abreast with what the U.S. is doing. StratCom, because it works on perceptions and influence rather than concrete effects, can be difficult to monitor in terms of effects, though it was quickly evolving as a community of serious practitioners and analysts.<sup>11</sup>

### **Organizational Responses to the New Strategic Environment**

#### *Social Media in the Operational Environment*

Military and government officials have for better or worse tried to respond to the social media phenomenon in a manner similar to historic shifts in technology that revolutionized warfare. This has sometimes caused an overemphasis on the technical aspects and not enough on the more profound changes in the ways information and meaning is created and shared. Perhaps most confounding for governments is the fact that social media creates a worldwide platform for the communications of an unprecedented

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

range of individuals and entities, both friendly and unfriendly; there is an ever-increasing number and variety of actors competing as well as cooperating in the information environment. Social media's capacity to spread words, sound and video instantly and around the world on wireless handheld devices has been credited with enabling great strides forward for democracy, as in the case of empowering disenfranchised Arab youth during the Arab Spring. It has also been blamed for its devastatingly destructive power, whether in the hands of the determined adversary, or simply in the hands of the negligent or irresponsible. When nearly every U.S. soldier in a war zone carries a personal cell phone (which can send video or photographs instantly over the internet), it is inevitable that some events that they record will be perceived as damaging images. Once these images are on the Internet, the negative effects can be multiplied to the point where there can be serious strategic consequences.

While it is not the purpose of this study to analyze the technological and social phenomena of recent events in the Middle East and North Africa, one can merely reflect on the events of the Arab Spring, which were engendered and propelled by the wide availability of the Internet, cell phones and satellite television among the populations involved. It has become evident that "social media" is a social, political—even anthropological—phenomenon, not just a technical capability.

Before the Arab Spring, the U.S. and NATO had started exploring the role of social media and relating it to the wide issues being debated among strategic communication practitioners and policy-makers; while the longer term impact of social media is still not clear, most practitioners saw social media as an important dimension in the evolving new policies for strategic communication and public diplomacy. SC

practitioners knew it should have a more prominent role in government communications. The challenge was how to do it. And the question was: how to do it quickly?

### ***A New SC Policy in Response to the New Information Environment***

In addition to creating the Strategic Communications cell at SHAPE, NATO both politically and on the military side has embraced Strategic Communication and moved forward with the development of a new policy. The first significant document was SHAPE's Allied Command Operations (ACO) 95-2, a policy directive from September 2008, which lays out the need for a policy in light of the global role of information and some of the points mentioned above in relation to the Afghanistan mission.<sup>12</sup> To begin with, the directive defines the role of StratCom within the broader information aspects of NATO tasks. Specifically, the directive calls on placing StratCom "in a central role to both assist in operations and manage public perceptions, and is the heart of leading and managing our responses to the challenges of the information era."<sup>13</sup> It also implies positioning StratCom above the already established PA and IO operations: "SACEUR therefore directed that a StratCom Office be created and expects all parts of ACO to assist StratCom in achieving its goals."<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the directive recognizes the importance of StratCom beyond the military function (PA and IO) and aligns it with the political dimension of NATO HQ's communications activities. While it acknowledges that public diplomacy is the responsibility of NATO HQ in Brussels, it indicates coordinating and aligning with the political side as well:

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<sup>12</sup> Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, *ACO Directive number 95-2, ACO 95-2, SHAPE, Belgium, September 2008*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 1.

StratCom as generally understood takes in all components of the information campaign, but Public Diplomacy and political guidance is the responsibility of NATO HQ. The following takes account of this in guiding ACO actions: *In concert with other military actions and following NATO political guidance, to advance ACO's aims and operations through the co-ordinated, appropriate use of Public Affairs and Information Operations, in co-operation with the Public Diplomacy Division.*<sup>15</sup>

It was somewhat radical for this established bureaucratic organization to not only create a new office with unique responsibilities, but to also position the new StratCom office's authority over areas of influence, not only above other existing military based information divisions, but also elevating its importance in the overall NATO structure to be a counterpart to the political headquarters level.

Further reinforcement to the trend came from SACEUR Admiral James Stavridis, who came to SHAPE in 2009 from USSOUTHCOM where he was known as a proponent of an enhanced role for Strategic Communication in national security.<sup>16</sup> NATO's SC enterprise benefitted from the support of the SHAPE leadership under SACEUR Stavridis, and from Laity's strategic vision of the information environment and diligent efforts to promote educating the organization's StratCom practitioners. These efforts in 2008 and 2009 increased momentum for improving StratCom effectiveness. By 2010 NATO actually made great strides as an organization to leverage the Strategic Communication capabilities in time to ensure a successful information effort for the Lisbon Summit of 2010, in which they managed to shift the media focus to the year 2014 for Transition (as opposed to 2011, the date which had become the focus of the media following President Obama's December 2009 speech at West Point.) In this case,

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>16</sup> James G. Stavridis, "Strategic Communication and National Security", *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 46, 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2007, 4.

NATO's Strategic Communication was clearly more political than military, as it was focused on creating confidence among member nations, the Afghan government, and other stakeholders. In fact, Chief StratCom Laity was called to Kabul in fall 2010 to assist the NATO Senior Civilian Representative Ambassador Mark Sedwill to prepare a communications strategy for the Lisbon Summit. The success at Lisbon justified the trend to grant StratCom greater influence in coordinating roles for all communications functions of NATO and to pull together a critical plan in a way that the organization, as formerly structured, could probably not have achieved.

The positive effects from the StratCom effort applied to the Lisbon Conference justified the action of adding another "layer" to an organization at a time when budget constraints were calling for cutting back; the StratCom cell was created at the same time NATO reform was calling for reductions and scaling back the structure of the organization. It must be understood, therefore, that the decision to authorize the additional StratCom structure at a time when the organization was committed to the process of streamlining, reducing, or eliminating other parts of its structure shows that StratCom proved to enable an "economy of force" for NATO's information efforts.

Both the U.S. government and NATO have responded to the post 9/11 threats by re-examining the global information environment and seeking ways to adapt their conventional information disciplines and structures in order to achieve greater operational effectiveness with SC. They have been urgently playing "catch-up" to the Taliban information operatives and other adversaries. These asymmetrical warriors and the loosely networked insurgent groups have operated with great advantages on the information battle space: unlike the government organizations mentioned above, they are

not held accountable to any recognized standards of truthfulness, democracy, or even the laws of armed conflict, which above all are meant to protect innocent civilians. However, the urgency of the situation has engendered a spirit of reform in NATO and the U.S. and propelled adaptation in both of these large government organizations, beginning at the policy level and working its way down to the operational level.

## **CHAPTER 5: TOWARDS AN OPERATIONAL MODEL FOR CIVILIAN-MILITARY STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION COORDINATION**

### **Structural Approaches to Change**

#### ***Coordination, Not Reorganization***

There has been broad consensus that one of the keys to greater effectiveness is to be found through successfully coordinating and synchronizing SC activities across the whole of government.<sup>1</sup> The Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal year 2009 required the President to provide a report on his Administration's interagency strategy for public diplomacy and strategic communication of the Federal government.<sup>2</sup> In response, President Obama submitted the 2010 National Framework for Strategic Communication. While it acknowledged the need for greater synchronization and coordination, and the need to examine the possible need to rebalance resources between State and DoD, it made clear that no new organizations should be created, and no changes in the existing authorities of government agencies should be made:

To be clear, we are not creating or advocating for the creation of new terms, concepts, organizations or capabilities.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Paul, *Whither Strategic Communications? A Survey of Current Proposals and Recommendations*, (Santa Monica, CA., RAND Corp, February 25, 2009). Paul's report, as mentioned in Chapter Two of this study, identifies the four main recommendations he distilled from the most relevant studies to date on U.S. strategic communications. Essentially they are: leadership; resources; clearer overall U.S. strategy; and better coordination and organizational change (or additions).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Congress, *Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act For Fiscal Year 2009*, Public Law 110-417, 110th Congress, May 22, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> President Barack Obama, *National Framework for Strategic Communication*, Report to Congress, March 16, 2010, 2.

The document goes on to address the oft-repeated lament that the USG should create an independent organization for information—as a way to replace the lost capabilities of USIA:

The National Security Staff currently sees no need to establish a new, independent, not-for-profit organization responsible for providing independent assessment and strategic guidance on strategic communication and public diplomacy ... At this time, the existing enterprise either already meets or is working to meet the recommended purposes of the organization...<sup>4</sup>

The National Security Council (NSC) has been the national forum for discussion and debate of the most critical issues regarding SC and national security, with various committees created over the years to coordinate the broadest policies through the interagency. However, it remains an advisory body only and does not have an operational function. Responsibility for operations remains with the individual agencies. Therefore, agencies have been responsible for coordinating SC and PD among themselves, in response to directions coming down from the NSC. At the higher levels, agencies do this effectively through committees and working groups. However, consistent coordination has not been sustained through the theater-strategic to the operational levels of the respective agencies. A more robust approach to civ-mil coordination at the operational level is needed, and it does not have to be achieved through any major change in the existing structures of government. The 2010 National Framework proposes improvements through “mechanisms and processes” and cultivating a “culture of communication” rather than through new organizational structures.

#### ***From Strategic Level to Operational Level***

Policies established at the national level do not always lead to the development of a clear strategy, whether at the national level or the agency level. DoD has a well-

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 14.

developed process for developing military strategy that links to and nests within the highest-level national security strategy, and that creates subsequent subordinate military strategies, and eventually operational level plans. DOS has never had the same type of approach to strategy. Analysts as well as practitioners within the organization have observed that DOS operations typically link directly to policies, by-passing the strategic process altogether. DOS has been criticized by practitioners on the military side that they “don’t know how to do planning.” This has become a rather unfair comparison between DoD and DOS, as the nature of the work, the structure and scale of the organizations, and different roles that each has in the U.S. government determines their authorities and functions. For example, the Secretary of State is the principal foreign affairs advisor to the President. DOS actually is responsible for both shaping and carrying out most of U.S. foreign policy. This is accomplished through a constant feedback loop with DOS officials on the ground at U.S. embassies overseas and their respective regional bureaus at the Department of State, with each bureau headed by an Assistant Secretary. Responsibility for most day-to-day foreign policy issues are handled between the embassies and the senior staff of the regional bureaus and are not elevated even to the Assistant Secretary level, let alone to levels of government above that. The bottom line is that DOS is a much flatter organization, with even mid-level officers empowered with a great degree decision-making authority. Therefore, the organization is able to operate on a day-to-day basis without elaborate operational plans. Nonetheless, DOS has the overall lead role in engaging foreign audiences and increasingly must coordinate many efforts with DoD. Coordination and synchronization of efforts is one of the greatest ongoing challenges for DoD and DOS. Furthermore, while tasked with a leading role for SC, DOS still does not

have nearly the level of funding, manpower and the array of capabilities that DoD has available across its organization to quickly leverage for worldwide operations.

### ***DOS or DoD: Is It an Either-Or Proposition?***

While there has been a degree of tension and competition between DOS and DoD with respect to strategic communication and public diplomacy, there is an even greater desire in both organizations for DOS to take on more responsibilities and to be better resourced to carry out the mostly civilian-led tasks required to implement strategic communication and public diplomacy overseas. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates famously called for more funding for the Department of State.<sup>5</sup> While DOS remains under-resourced, DoD, with its greater resources and manpower, has repeatedly stepped in to fill the gap, carrying out public diplomacy functions traditionally assigned to DOS. The prevailing view in the U.S. Congress is that they would prefer to see DOS in charge of all public diplomacy. For example, a 2009 Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report to Congress states:

Many observers, including some Members of congressional committees, have criticized DOD's expansion into non-military communications and public diplomacy that they believe the State Department should undertake.<sup>6</sup>

It is widely acknowledged that DoD is "filling the gap" left by State's lack of resources and personnel shortfalls. Nonetheless, the CRS Report warns that "whatever the reasons

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, speech delivered as part of *Landon Lecture Series*, Kansas State University, November 26, 2007. [www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=48226](http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=48226), (accessed February 12, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Congressional Research Services Report for Congress, *U.S. Public Diplomacy: Background and Current Issues*, December 18, 2009, 41.

for the expansion of DOD engagement with foreign publics, many analysts see problems with it.”<sup>7</sup> The Report cites the House Appropriations Committee’s concerns:

The Committee has serious concerns about … the Department’s assumption of this mission area [certain new information operations programs] within its roles and responsibilities. Much of the content of what is being produced … is focused so far beyond a traditional military information operation that the term non-traditional military information operation does not justly apply. At face value, much of what is being produced appears to be United States Military, and more alarmingly non-military propaganda, public relations, and behavioral modification messaging.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile the White House has called for a review of programs carried out by the military that may need to be transferred to the Department of State:

We recognize the need to ensure an appropriate balance between civilian and military efforts. As a result, a process has been initiated to review existing programs and resources to identify current military programs that might be better executed by other Departments and Agencies.<sup>9</sup>

And more explicitly, in the same report, in a section titled “Resources,” the White House delicately refers to the military having (perhaps inappropriately) taken on civilian roles, which may be more effectively executed by the established civilian agencies:

It is essential that we balance and optimize investment across the communications community. Resource decisions and applications must be shaped by national priorities and be consistent with existing roles and missions and the capacity of each stakeholder to effectively execute validated tasks and programs.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>9</sup> President Barack Obama, *National Framework for Strategic Communication*, Report to Congress, March 16, 2010, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 6.

The document goes on to acknowledge that there are situations in which the military may continue to carry out traditionally civilian-led communications task, specifically in a theater of war. But outside of that, traditional roles should be restored:

An interagency working group has been formed to evaluate military communication and engagement programs, activities, and investments to identify those that may be more appropriately funded or implemented by civilian agencies.<sup>11</sup>

There will be continued debate and discussion about which agency should have responsibility for certain types of programs. In the meantime, both DoD and DOS have strategic communication roles, many of which need to be coordinated and synchronized. The NSC, and sometimes DOS, coordinates the broad national themes and messages. However, the most urgent challenge remains: how to implement the national level direction down through the structures of each organization and on down to the operational level. In recent years greater coordination has been enhanced through the noteworthy increase in formal DoD-DOS exchanges and embeds (e.g., the POLAD system), and the daily collaboration between the Pentagon and State in Washington on a variety of committees and working groups.

There has been somewhat less formal coordination at the operational level. The operational level of coordination is currently evolving. For example, there are operational-level coordination activities in the recently established DOS Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO),<sup>12</sup> as well as in the recently created Center

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>12</sup> CSO also has a strong planning function, to include analysis and assessment phases before and after implementation of plans. The planning function is a key to coordination among the different actors; CSO coordinates between DOS and DoD, and also other international partners. According to the State Department website, CSO's Office of Partnerships works "with partner governments and multilateral organizations, the private sector, NGOs, and civil society organizations; coordinates with the U.S.

for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication. Both are new, integrated structures under the auspices of DOS. Further advances in coordination have emerged through the recent adaptations encouraged in the U.S campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. The urgency of the missions, and the war-time authority of theater level commanders to re-assess and shape the campaign (as opposed to Washington based departments and offices) has enabled more ad-hoc approaches to civilian-military coordination. In addition, the experiences of the many U.S. civilian and military personnel who have served in those campaigns, especially in Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) have provided a wealth of examples and lessons learned for further improvement and for eventually formalizing effective new processes into doctrine.

From Iraq and Afghanistan we have examples of evolving headquarters-level processes for civilian-military coordination. As mentioned previously, General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker expanded and formalized the civilian-military approach during the Iraq campaign. One of their challenges was to link the tactical level in the field with the integrating concepts that were being implemented in the capital and coordinated through the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. However, in many cases there were no civilian counterparts for the military to partner with; while there were U.S. government civilians working at the tactical level in BCTs and PRTs, there was typically no civilian counterpart at the military operational commands (Core and Division), where much of the planning for tactical operations was conducted.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, even at the tactical level,

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Department of Defense and other Department of State bureaus to set civilian-military guidelines and procedures for conflict operations; conducts public affairs and outreach."

<http://www.state.gov/j/cso/about/organization/index.htm> (accessed February 27, 2012).

<sup>13</sup>Joint Center for Operational Analysis, U.S. Joint Forces Command, *Operation Iraqi Freedom, January 2007 to December 2008 - The Comprehensive Approach: an Iraq Case Study*, February 16, 2010 (unclassified report), 5.

tactical commanders did not always understand the need to integrate civilian efforts as widely and comprehensively as called for in Petraeus' COIN strategy. Because of the importance of reinforcing the concept of integrating civilian and military efforts at all levels, General Petraeus devoted great effort to keeping the central headquarters engaged with the field, often through "battlefield circulation" so he could personally provide direction as well as assess the feedback from the field.

The civilian-military integration was more formalized for the Afghanistan campaign, especially once the 2009 ICMCP was instituted. Based essentially on the same COIN doctrine developed by Petraeus, the 2009 plan set a new standard of integration for a civilian-military campaign. This was most likely attributed to the recent lessons learned from both Iraq and Afghanistan, along with a constant process of refining the strategy. In addition, the senior civilian and military leaders, who had themselves played important roles in creating and refining the strategy, were deeply committed to implementing it. The ICMCP was still a strategic document, intended to provide a framework for unity of effort. It did formalize civilian-military coordination at the national level, primarily through national-level working groups, where military personnel could "thicken" embassy efforts in support of traditionally civilian-led projects to improve governance and development at the level of the Afghan national government. The ICMCP was not an operational plan for the field activities in Afghanistan. It was meant to provide guidance to regional-level commands, which had responsibility for creating operational plans at the sub-national level:

The Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan provides *strategic guidance* from the United States (U.S.) Chief of Mission and the Commander of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) to American personnel in Afghanistan, both civilian and

military ... *As this is a strategic document, it sets priorities only down to the regional level...*<sup>14</sup> (my emphasis)

Similar to the situation in Iraq, where there was a gap of civilian counterparts at the operational command level, in Afghanistan there was also a challenge to flesh out a parallel civilian structure from top to bottom. Obviously PRTs had civilians, and at the national headquarters level there was plenty of potential for exploiting formal civ-mil coordination. In fact, there were so many U.S. civilian jobs in Kabul that the U.S. mission was criticized for failing to move enough civilian personnel out to the regional and provincial levels. In response to the growing demand for more civilians, the U.S. mission had to establish the personnel structures and funding authorities before any added positions could be staffed. Creating and staffing new positions with *bona fide* U.S. government personnel is a process that, due to established regulations, cannot be speeded up significantly. However, even during the so-called “civilian surge” of 2010-2011, many newly-established civilian field positions remained unfilled, mainly because of the difficulty in recruiting, training, and re-positioning qualified civilian personnel—who would be willing and able to go work in a war zone. Another point to consider as far as retention of those civilians who were placed in field positions is the fact that USG civilians in Afghanistan were allowed to resign their post under a no-fault curtailment policy.

### **Lessons from the Field**

#### ***A First-Hand Experience of the “Civilian Surge” in Afghanistan***

It is in this context of the civilian surge and the newly created civilian positions at the regional commands that the author became part of this story. As a Foreign Service

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<sup>14</sup> ICMCP, i.

officer assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Kabul in 2010, the author was responsible for public diplomacy and media support for the embassy. The U.S. mission, while trying to recruit and assign more civilians from the U.S. home agencies to come to support the mission in Afghanistan, also reached out to those already at the embassy who would be willing to move out to the field where they were most urgently needed. In early 2011, the author moved to Regional Command-East at Bagram Airfield to fill the a position as Regional Public Diplomacy Officer, coordinating with military counterparts in SC, IO and PA, and to work as a member of the stability operations team on the commander's staff at the division headquarters. The position also included responsibility for directing embassy-sponsored public diplomacy programs at the PRT level throughout the fourteen provinces in the region. While working on various planning teams the author observed the gap between the national-level strategic direction (i.e. awareness of U.S. policy on a range of issues in Afghanistan as articulated by the embassy), and the military guidance that was being used at the operational level. While there was undoubtedly synergy at the national headquarters level, it was not always understandable to those military personnel tasked with creating the plans for field operations; and what was not understood was often ignored. As the Division's J5 planning team developed plans for various operations, it was often a challenge for the author as a civilian—officially assigned to the J9 (Stability Operations) section in the same headquarters—to insert the Embassy or State Department perspective. Nonetheless, plans that failed to integrate that perspective—which would ensure adherence to overall U.S. policy in Afghanistan—would eventually create conflicts when reviewed by higher commands or the embassy's political-military section, which was tasked with managing the refinement of the ICMCP.

### *Some Recommendations for Operational Level Civ-Mil Coordination*

The author did find ways to better coordinate the civilian side with the military, but also learned more about the challenges inherent in civ-mil integration, such as the negative effects resulting from the great disparity in manpower, as well as the different organizational cultures. Everyone knows the clichés about Powerpoint, but it is important for civilians to understand the ways the military communicates its ideas, as much as it is important for the military to understand that civilians will have ideas that they don't immediately understand. They will need to work together to make sure there is mutual clarity. The extra time needed for this clarification and understanding process will definitely pay off in the longer term. And the author would emphasize that this process must take place at every level of the parallel civilian and military structures, or chains of command (not just the national headquarters level), ideally counterpart-to-counterpart and reinforced with guidance from senior civilian and military bosses at every command.

Civilians are more experienced working in peer-level teams, as equals. On the military side, leaders should emphasize to their staffs that the civilian's expertise and organizational perspective should be given serious consideration. Military staff should be less concerned about the personal rank of the civilian as a means to judge the importance of their input.

Civilians, who are typically from a flatter organization and have more access to higher level officials within their own organizations, also tend to have more freedom to engage with a wide range of actors in theater. Military personnel tend to be more constrained by their rank and position and are less free to consult with a variety of actors without explicit authorization. Because the civilian typically can do this, he or she

provides a potentially valuable resource of insights and perspectives beyond their individual expertise, and can offer more depth and vitality to any civilian-military team.

The author also found that the military was willing and able to share resources and efforts as long as the civilians could demonstrate how such requests were aligned with the mission goals, especially when expressed in terms of the specific objectives in the campaign plan which were likely to be understood readily by military personnel on the command staff.

Good personal working relations need to be encouraged and supported, as there is a tendency in difficult and stressful conditions for people to fall back on what is familiar. When people are stressed, it's harder to bridge the civilian-military cultural gap. Both civilian and military leaders need to support good relations, foster good morale, and be alert to signs of resentment and blame. The author observed many occasions when civilian and military leaders made real efforts to foster the civ-mil team morale without bias to one side or the other. This is a critical leadership function for a civ-mil team.

The recommendations in the preceding paragraphs of this section address some of the “moral”<sup>15</sup> aspects of a civ-mil campaign effort. Structure is an important aspect of operational level civ-mil coordination as well. As in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan, civ-mil structures such as PRTs and national-level working groups greatly enhanced coordination and in fact, were integrated efforts. Parallel civilian and military chains of command are important, and legally it is not feasible to have either side direct or command the other (even though they do in some exceptional cases).

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<sup>15</sup> To be understood as “moral” as described by Clausewitz, not in the modern, conventional sense of morality, but the full range of human psychology, to include morale, motivation, resolve, inspiration, commitment, mental fortitude, etc. See: Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, (Michael Howard and Peter Paret eds.) Alfred A. Knopf, New York, (Everyman's Library, 1993). See chapter on “Moral Factors”, 216-217.

Vertical as well as horizontal coordination is important. Vertically there should be clear channels of communication and understanding of mission goals up and down the chain, from national headquarters to regional or operational commands to field units. There is the danger of over-doing the vertical communications, too. There is a tendency for headquarters to demand more and more information from lower levels, which can become too much of a burden on field operations. Personnel in the field can become demoralized and confused by too much micromanaging from higher-level headquarters (usually coming from headquarters staff, with their seemingly insatiable desire for information). Information that is fed back up to headquarters should actually be used constructively. When civilian personnel in the field at sub-national levels see no effects from their reporting contributions to headquarters, they will find ways to avoid reporting, or will simply go through the motions, sending less quality information.

Horizontally, personnel should be empowered to seek out counterparts for cooperation on issues of shared interest, even if not working directly on the same project or team; regular, informal consultation provides valuable situational awareness and increased coherence for lines of effort. Working groups are an excellent way to create a common understanding of issues and a way to feed new information to respective offices and agencies. However, the group's effort should lead to or support actual tasks (of the campaign plan, for example), whether reporting, making plans, carrying out programs or supporting events. Civilian-military coordination is not an end in itself; it is an enabling approach to advance the mission's goals. Sometimes civilian members of a civ-mil team are seemingly satisfied merely to gain knowledge and understanding (and building relationships) from participating in the working group, while military members tend to

want to translate that new understanding into more immediate action. Neither is wrong or right; it depends on the circumstances. The point is to be aware of the possible differences in the working styles.

Planning teams provide an excellent opportunity to focus different perspectives and expertise on a common problem and shared goals. Planning teams for a civ-mil campaign should include civilians, and team leaders should make an effort to encourage civilians to give their input. Civilians can easily be overwhelmed and overshadowed by the greater number of military colleagues and the battle rhythm of the planning team, and may find it is not worth the trouble to “fight” for their input to be considered in the planning. Vastly outnumbered civilians at the division headquarters where the author served had many responsibilities and did not typically have time to attend as many planning meetings as most military personnel did.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, planning team leaders should be aware that just because civilians are not present at all meetings, their contributions should not be deleted from successive rounds of planning when they are not there to “defend” them. In fact, because of the tendency to be eroded or overwhelmed through the military planning process, civilian colleagues’ input in the planning teams should be presumed to carry more weight, and military planners should be warned against diminishing or disregarding civilian input, which by definition should be different in perspective from what military personnel would come up with themselves. The author

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<sup>16</sup> In Afghanistan the division headquarters have been established at the “regional” level, where there is no existing Afghan government counterpart structure, and therefore there had been no substantial diplomatic or civilian presence. In contrast, the civ-mil PRTs are at the provincial level, with a provincial governor and other provincial government officials with whom to interact and coordinate, and DSTs had district level Afghan contacts. The regional concept in Afghanistan was invented for the ISAF mission as a geographic approach for dividing security responsibility among ISAF forces. Of course the great majority of Afghan structures and counterparts to U.S. civilian mentors and advisors is to be found in the national capital, Kabul.

observed several instances when military colleagues did not immediately understand or agree with the civilian input into a problem, and because it was not what they would do, or in sync with how they would frame the problem, the civilian input was dismissed. Of course, the civilian must share the responsibility of making their input clear, and ideally, finding a way to help military planners receive civilians' ideas in a way that is understood by the military and fits with the military planning format. This is a real challenge and requires some experience. If at all possible, some training in military planning should be provided to civilians who will be sent to operational-level headquarters. This would be an effective way to reduce the "cultural divide" between civilian and military work styles.<sup>17</sup>

Some recent studies have posed the question of how to "operationalize" public diplomacy and strategic communication. Most of these studies start from the premise that national level policy has already indicated the general strategic direction, whether that has been expressed as whole of government, coordination, integration, a comprehensive approach, smart power or some other concept for leveraging all existing capabilities in order to maximize the strength, and extend and deepen the positive effects of U.S. strategic communications.

One study, by Colonel David Anders of the U.S. Army, asserts that strategic communication should be operationalized in order to establish an offensive, proactive

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<sup>17</sup> The author would comment here that as a public diplomacy officer supervising exchange programs and visitors programs, she has seen several cases where foreigners from different countries and different cultures learned to work effectively with Americans or other nationals, even though they have very divergent cultural backgrounds. The key was to first identify the common goal or interest. Then, focus on understanding "how" the other works, instead of questioning "why" the other does things in a different way.

approach for SC in the counterinsurgency fight.<sup>18</sup> The assumption is that U.S. communications are reactive and defensive. There has been anecdotal evidence that the military's focus has been on damage control over the potential negative effects of mishaps, such as civilian casualties or acts that could be perceived as offensive to the host nation population. There are some spectacular cases of truly damaging acts committed by U.S. troops, whether acting under flawed or misguided orders, or outright criminal or unethical acts, such as murdering civilians or desecrating corpses. In these cases, especially with the almost instantaneous broadcast through global communications, the information effort tends to be reactive and has limited positive effects: the damage is already done. Meanwhile, the enemy quickly exploits any potentially negative event without any constraints for authorization or truthfulness. Anders' proposition is that SC needs greater priority at the operational level and should be treated as an "offensive resource" implying that in military doctrine "offensive" equals initiative. To do this he suggests a model for operational plans giving SC its own Line of Operation (LOO) "on equal footing" with the other LOOs in the COIN spectrum.<sup>19</sup>

Anders' framing of the problem reinforces one of this study's observations: that operational level planning staffs need to understand strategic guidance in a language and format concretely familiar to their military planning world. Anders' assumption is flawed: it is highly unlikely that the U.S. COIN strategy that he refers to can be shown to in any way indicate that strategic communication would *not* be on equal footing with security, governance, and development. In fact the case is quite the opposite, as General

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<sup>18</sup> COL David P. Anders, "Developing an Operational Level Strategic Communications Model for Counterinsurgency," *Strategy Research Project*, United States Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 2009, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 4.

Petraeus emphasized throughout the Field Manual (FM 3-24). The problem is that in spite of the importance of strategic communication, it is not a simple function; strategic communication requires a depth of understanding of the complex dynamic of a specific local environment, as well as the strategic intention and broad themes of the national level. It cannot be spoon-fed in easy to implement packages; practitioners—and commanders at all levels—need to have a well-developed understanding of the underlying principles, awareness of the local culture and the strategic environment, and knowledge and experience coordinating the various information disciplines—whether IO, PSYOP, PA, or PD.

Therefore, any model for operationalizing SC must provide for a minimum staffing with SC expertise and include civilians. If possible, specialized expertise of the local culture should be leveraged as well. This could be academics, such as those hired for the widely publicized Human Terrain System (HTS)—the U.S. Army program that brought in social scientists, such as anthropologists, linguists, and ethnographers, to provide commanders better understanding of local cultures. Because these academics were embedded with combat troops, the program became controversial for the danger it posed to the academics (several of whom were killed or wounded while deployed in theater).<sup>20</sup> It also received criticism from the academic sector itself, which viewed the use of academics for military operations unethical and damaging to the objective and neutral status of researchers everywhere. Nonetheless, there is still a need for local culture subject matter experts to participate as much as possible in operational level planning activities.

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<sup>20</sup> Jason Motlagh, "Should Anthropologists Help Contain the Taliban?" *Time Magazine*, July 1, 2010. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2000169,00.html> (accessed January 2012).

A study by a Foreign Service officer at the Naval War College proposes the Geographic Combatant Command level as an optimal structure for civ-mil operational coordination of SC/PD.<sup>21</sup> While CCDRs have to-date employed an ad hoc approach to collaboration with DOS, Wilbur suggests that with a few simple steps, more formalized operation level coordination with DOS's public diplomacy bureau would allow for improved civ-mil SC efforts in theater. In particular he suggest linkages directly with the DOS PD structures in Washington and at the embassy level. The current POLAD program typically embeds a political coned Foreign Service officer as the primary liaison for the CCDR (not a public diplomacy coned officer)<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, by reaching out to public diplomacy officers at the country (embassy) level in the CCDR's AOR, a more synergistic alignment of SC capabilities and programs could be possible.

Wilbur's recommendations could be helpful as far as creating greater awareness among military SC practitioners of DOS PD operations. However, his proposal for embassy PD officers to support CCDR operations is a bit of a stretch. It may be possible depending on the specific circumstances and personalities, but is unlikely to be a formal structure, as the reality of PD officers, and their local PD embassy staff, is that they are hard pressed to fulfill their current tasks. A Congressional report expressed concern that 13% of FSO public diplomacy officer positions worldwide remained unfilled due to PD staffing shortfalls. Embassies simply cannot afford to commit their PD capabilities to the

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<sup>21</sup> Richard M. Wilbur, *Strategic Communication Meets Public Diplomacy: DaD-DOS Collaboration at the Operational Level*, Final Report, Naval War College, Newport, RI, October 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Every U.S. Foreign Service Officer (FSO) generalist is assigned from the beginning of their career to one of five professional "cones": Political, Public Diplomacy, Economic, Consular or Management. While developing professional competence in the overall diplomatic enterprise, the FSO will have significantly greater expertise in their own cone, and eventually serve in leadership roles, typically as the head of a corresponding embassy section or office or bureau in Washington, before moving up to broader leadership roles.

CCDR through any formal arrangements. There may be occasions for informal cooperation, should circumstances permit, but their priorities will have to be to the embassy's mission and the ambassador's priorities, as well as reporting to the Washington offices of the PD programs they manage in country. It is somewhat unrealistic to suggest that PD personnel and programs in country as a capability ripe for CCDRs to exploit. That is not to say that there cannot be coordination and alignment—in fact there should not be any need to de-conflict messages—since SC themes are broadly consistent and should be reinforced by both the CCDR's shaping and engagement activities, as well as the embassy's PD and outreach activities. It is certainly a good idea for the embassy and CCDRs to have awareness of the other's operations, but it does not make sense in the current situation to recommend that CCDRs can look to exploit the embassy's PD resources through any new formal arrangement, such as the one recommended in Wilbur's study.

In fact, the more logical trend would be for military strategic communication and public outreach capabilities to be made available to civilian operations, and to synchronize with diplomatic missions in their AOR. The civilians would lend guidance on messaging and country sensitivities and help shape the effort with their greater understanding of the diplomatic objectives. The military personnel would develop greater awareness of how military objectives relate to diplomatic or political objectives and would be able to refine and expand their range of operational capabilities. Because even if some communication roles are “re-balanced” from DoD back to DOS, the size, scale and personnel system of the DOS would prevent individual officers from developing highly specialized capabilities in SC; FSOs will continually need to develop a broad

approach and adjust efforts to changing policies and conditions. Furthermore, as they progress in their careers they will move into leadership roles handling broader foreign policy and management issues. As long as U.S. public diplomacy is carried out by the Department of State it will lack large numbers of highly specialized SC professionals that can be deployed to the field. It makes sense for DOS to leverage the strengths of DoD, and in turn put civilian efforts into coordinating more effectively through greater awareness and responsiveness to different work cultures, establishing clarity and common understanding of strategic goals, and finding the most complementary way to synergistically leverage existing civilian and military capabilities to improve U.S. strategic communication.

## **CONCLUSION**

Within the parameters of this study we have highlighted key events and ideas that have shaped the broader discussion of how to improve the U.S. government's effectiveness in the area of strategic communication and public diplomacy. The initial challenges and crises of confidence that confronted the U.S. in the post 9/11 period led to intensive and sustained government efforts to examine the role of strategic communication in national security. The broad result of those studies, reports, and testimonies has been an overwhelming reaffirmation of SC's national-level importance to U.S. national security, along with a consensus that the U.S. must become more effective in the application of its information lever of national power.

Some of the earlier calls for high-level leadership and engagement on these issues have been answered: the USG has responded with executive-level policies establishing a requirement for prioritizing SC in all U.S. executive agencies. In some cases, more attention has been paid to existing policies that had previously been obstructed or poorly understood. In addition, the challenge remains that newly created as well as existing policies still have to be successfully implemented, and some progress has been made on that score, although most commentators agree that much more progress is still needed.

The studies mentioned in Chapter 5 all contribute insights into operational level civilian-military coordination that apply to SC/PD as well as other lines of effort. In many ways, what has actually worked at the operational level is a combination of clear strategic guidance, a solid framework or theater campaign plan with clearly stated objectives and end states for the operational level, and outlining civilian and military tasks. Civilian and military leaders at all levels must support morale and continually

reinforce the importance of civ-mil integration and unity of effort, and demonstrate it themselves.

In addition, this study recommends that with a good campaign plan establishing unity of purpose, operational level civ-mil staffs should be enabled to form working groups with peers from as broad a range of actors as possible. They should be empowered, in the spirit of the concept of “mission command,”<sup>1</sup> a concept of military command that is decentralized so that subordinate commanders, with a clear understanding of the mission’s goals and purpose, are enabled to make quick decisions and adapt to changing situations without being required to seek higher level authorization. Civ-mil staffs should be able to act according to their best judgment of the situation, and within their range of responsibility and the authorities of their respective agencies—without undue interference from superiors or higher-level commands.

This study has examined recent efforts by the U.S. government and NATO to adjust policies in response to the changing information environment and to integrate civilian and military efforts in the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns: Without actually adding capabilities on the SC side, both organizations seek to optimize SC unity of effort and operational and strategic effects through greater coordination of existing capabilities—in some cases (e.g. NATO) with new coordinating authorities to take in PA, IO, and PD. The author has highlighted some of the results of analyses of both campaigns, including her own first-hand experiences in Afghanistan. In this study the author has offered some recommendations to enhance coordination of whole of

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, “Joint Operations,” *Joint Publication 3-0*, August 11, 2011, 5-3. DoD defines mission command as “the conduct of military operations through decentralized execution based on mission orders for effective mission accomplishment. Successful mission command results from subordinate leaders at all echelons exercising disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to accomplish missions. It requires an environment of trust and mutual understanding.”

government, or civilian-military strategic communication efforts, in particular at the operational level.

Ultimately, operational level civ-mil coordination depends on developing an understanding of the common mission and an understanding of the differences in military and civilian working cultures. Good personal relationships and trust are essential to bridging the gap and working through the fog and friction of misunderstanding and the comparatively uneven representation between civilians and military personnel. While some believe there should be more command and control of civilians in a theater dominated by military operations, the author does not find that to be consistent with the analysis of recent operations. Civilians bring flexibility and expertise that is a force multiplier for a military operation. The very same flexibility and unique perspective could be stifled by imposing a rigid and alien command structure over civilians who are already doing their best to adapt to a strange working environment in a theater of war. There will always be a gap between civilian and military organizations and personnel.

The gap can be narrowed (and possibly closed) with a solid framework (or campaign plan) for cooperation, informed civilian and military leadership, and individual efforts to increase understanding and cooperation among colleagues. The key to success is in the “moral” dimension and cannot be achieved through structural change alone. As the Joint Chiefs of Staff have indicated, the critical requirements for benefitting from mission command would be an environment of trust and mutual understanding. Achieving these optimal conditions for operationalizing civ-mil coordination will require a serious commitment from both civilian and military leadership, on-going commitment

to training, and capturing lessons learned. As Clausewitz would say, it's simple, but not easy.

This study comes to the conclusion that strategic communication is more than just a process, and it is also more than just a capability. Strategic communication is a high-level priority across the U.S. national security establishment, and the need for improvement in SC and PD that was examined in Chapters One and Two of this study is still an important issue for the USG. There will continue to be debates over an exact definition of strategic communication and over which office or agency has authority over what activities. While certain activities may shift from one agency's lead to another's, there is unlikely to be any major organizational change made to the current government structures. Interagency SC coordination remains a key challenge. This study finds that civilian-military coordination can be improved through informed leadership and cultural adaptability for both civilians and military personnel in an environment of trust and mutual understanding especially within working-level integrated structures.

Greater understanding of foreign cultures, audiences, and attitudes is increasingly a priority for leadership and personnel beyond just the information and culture disciplines. Beyond the issue of additional resources, advancing SC requires learning a new *way* of thinking—whether regarding working as part of a civ-mil team or when engaging foreign partners and audiences—not learning *what* to think. More sophisticated and flexible thinking is what is needed from leaders and empowered subordinates. Commanders will need to embrace a certain degree of risk through enabling operational level personnel to act and engage according to well-understood SC principles in theater,

but that is the most realistic prospect for leveraging the maximum effects from the existing capabilities of the information pillar of U.S. national power.

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## **VITA**

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